

**LIMINAL SHOWERS:
A RITUAL PERFORMANCE IN PRISONER ADVOCACY**

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of prison theatre practitioners, both within the prison and in their free-communities. Through ethnographic, theoretical, and performance based research I aim towards offering readers an embodied learning experience as they engage with the text. Confronting one of prison educators' biggest critiques—that we reinforce the prison system by working with prison officials in order to gain access to inmates—I illuminate prison theatre practitioners as being caught within a paradox through being situated as tools for both liberating and policing bodies.

Through engaging performative writing, I analyze my ethnographic data with a focus on access, application, and affect using Victor Turner's theory on ritual and *communitas*. Furthermore, I interpret recorded interviews with prison arts practitioner Cory Arcak using Kristen Langellier's theories on storytelling and personal narrative performance, positioning inmates, as well as the greater community within a family context. I argue, prison theatre practitioners transgress their paradoxical roles by bridging the gap between inmates and the free world as they share their personal experiences working behind prison walls.

In loving memory of Dr. Joel E. McKee;
my inspiration, my first love, and my father.

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LIST OF CHARACTERS¹

GUEST-ACTORS.....	You
MISS.....	Late 20's; prison theatre practitioner
VOICE.....	Never seen, but heard; Arcak's personal narratives
NARRATOR.....	Voice of theory; symbol of oppression
UNCLE SAM.....	Voice of power, Controller of the panopticon
ENSEMBLE.....	JOKERs, ACTORs, and FROGs
Audience Entrance.....	JOKERs 1-5
Pre-liminal Conundrums.....	JOKERs 1 & 2
The "Actor" Prepares.....	ACTORs 1-5
The Liminal "Spect-actor".....	ACTORs 1 & 2
.....FROG A, inmate "spect-actor", played by ACTOR 3	
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TIME & PLACE

The Present: United States of America

¹ This thesis is written as a ritual in its entirety. Though many of the characters in the above list refer directly to characters written in to the two-act script that makes up chapters 3 and 4, my placement of this list is intentional. My decision to include the character list at the beginning of this thesis should be regarded as an effort to support the frame of my work as a six-act ritual performance in writing.

I. ROOT CHAKRA: INTRODUCTION

“The world view is materialistic and governed by hard realities with a lethargic hanging onto existence.”²

My experiences harken back to my early teenage years. Growing up, I did not know how to talk about my father’s incarceration. In the early years I was too young to understand that his absence was much more complex than an abandonment. I always knew he loved me; he is my father, and I loved him too. Overhearing stories regarding his imprisonment, his lack of effort, and comments such as “he must like it in the pokie,” enraged me. For a long time he seemed to be a “poster child” for prison recidivism, caught in a seemingly endless cycle of sentences for non-violent crimes: the revolving door known to be our prison-industrial complex.³ My anger also had to do with my confusion; I held my own resentments, often thinking “if he loves me, why isn’t he here?” Parents are the first roots we have in life; how was I to grow in his absence, and come to know the essence of a grounded, rooted “me?”

Storytelling is a powerful medium of communication, and method of identity building, and of situating oneself within the world around us. Stories that are told and re-told often evolve into “speech acts,” “producing and reproducing that to which it refers” (Langellier 1999). Negative stories told about my father made his situation, as well as my own, all too “real.” The man I once thought to be invincible carried his own tragic flaw. I have come to the realization that these kinds of stories perpetuate certain

² Quote taken from Mary Jo Meadow’s “Yogic Chakra Systems.” Each chapter begins with a quote from this source.

³ Recidivism refers to prisoners who have been released from incarceration and relapse back into criminal activities. Our national recidivism rate is approximately 67%.

ideologies around criminality. They reduce a man to a “criminal,” by erasing the individual—his past, unique experiences, socioeconomic context—and larger social issues at play. For my father, his personal narratives communicated deeply seated resentment towards a racist government that continually hindered his success. From institutional tinkering of his chiropractic test scores for his license to practice, to government vandalism against his office building, my father seemed to have an endless library of stories about his struggle to be one of the first black chiropractors in Denver in the late 1970s. These are not the stories we hear on the news, though, or in our communities. Not only is the convicted person erased from society while incarcerated; his identity is also erased through certain modes of storytelling that situate prisoners as one immoral being. Represented only by the prison, inmates become the scum of the earth, the lowest of the low in a moral hierarchy of the social sphere. The root chakra’s element is earth, “symbolizing the denser levels of being with which it is associated,” (Meadow 1993).⁴ Here I would like to resituate inmates from being seen as the scum of our earth, to being recognized as foundational to the current lifestyle from which we all grow. In other words, it is important to recognize the United States prison system as both a symbol of the powers that help shape our daily lives, as well as an industry that participates in the reproduction of our capitalist government (I will return to this in more detail once we’ve earned our rite to access the sacral chakra).

⁴ Each chapter in this thesis is rhetorically framed as a chakra. I draw from Mary Jo Meadow “Yogic Chakra Symbols: Mirrors of the Human Mind/Heart” for situating *Liminal Showers* as a written ritual performance, and use her article to define the individual chakras that guide readers through each section. An in depth explanation follows, beginning on bottom of page 9.

The United States incarcerates more of its population than any other country in the world. Racial and socioeconomic disparities within prison populations have become increasingly disputed with the spike in numbers of incarcerated people over the past 40 years. Prison theatre practitioners aim toward intervening in recidivistic cycles, by offering inmates tools for liberation, self-exploration, and interpersonal skills— all through collaborative performance engagements. Not only do practitioners work towards finding ways to intervene in issues of recidivism, they also hope to produce art that will have an ideological impact in the free world by challenging social stigmas that define criminality. At the same time, practitioners have been criticized for merely supporting our flawed system by working alongside the prison. They must first adhere to the rules and regulations of prison institutions in order to gain access to inmates. Because of this, practitioners must make certain sacrifices and compromises within the creative process in order to appease those who might grant them access into a facility. Therefore, my research investigates interpersonal tactics used by prison theatre facilitators as forms of resistance against ideas that prison educators (including prison theatre facilitators) are merely “tweaking Armageddon.”⁵ My research also explores innovative methods of working towards positive change in our criminal justice system, using the prison theatre practitioner herself.

I have explored a variety of questions that arise within the tensions created by the contradictory roles we (prison theatre practitioners) play: where and how do these tactics

⁵ Stephen Hartnett's article “Communication, Social Justice, and Joyful Commitment,” specifies how tensions materialize in the daily lives of prison educators. I borrow his term “tweaking Armageddon” in which he refers to the prison system as Armageddon (a battle between good and evil), explaining prison educators are criticized for working with the prison rather than resisting.

emerge to help undermine the reduction of facilitators' into policing tools, and emphasize their individual missions as advocates, activists, and artists? Furthermore, what brings theatre practitioners to the prison, and what is it that keeps them going back? Finally, in an attempt to extend my interlocutor's mission within my academic work, I ask: How can we use facilitators' narratives to performatively employ them as tools in activism? I investigated all of these questions within three overarching concepts all practitioners must ultimately face: access, application, and affect.⁶ While exploring these questions, I often found that the closer I seemed to approach answers, the more I would find new questions emerging in regards to larger systems of power. Why aren't more people angry? Why aren't the masses in protest? What can I really do? One thing I learned for sure as these questions rained heavily on me—soaking my mind, body, and spirit throughout the entirety of this project—is that one must embrace paradox in order to reach the unknown. Sing loudly, with confidence and righteous intentions, even through such heavy liminal showers.

Liminality in performance studies is often described as “betwixt and between;” neither “here” nor “there;” and generally used in conversation with ritual. Because prison theatre practitioners have been labeled as simultaneously liberators and policing tools while facilitating theatre inside prisons, I argue for a more positive perspective in defining this paradox. Rather than thinking about paradox as logically contradictory—in the realm of impossibility—I ask that we think of the prison theatre facilitators' paradox

⁶ Throughout this thesis I use affect in terms of “emotional states and the distinctive perturbations they cause in the body and mind” (Wetherell 2012)

as an important phase of a ritual process.⁷ They are in a liminal state; a state of transition; an opportunity that challenges practitioners' and scholars to reach beyond paradox towards unknown *possibilities*. This prospect for developing an innovative perspective on prison theatre work is the impetus for the research from which this thesis is derived.

I conducted both archival and ethnographic research, exploring the legacy of prison theatre discourse; collecting prison theatre practitioners' personal narratives; and immersing myself in prison theatre practice. My ethnographic fieldwork included three different prison theatre practitioners and their programs: Birgit Walker, founder of Children's Prison Arts Project (CPAP) in Houston, TX, Robby Henson, founder of Voices Inside in Burgin, KY, and Cory Arcak, founder of the TreeHouse Project in Bryan, TX. Each practitioner has their own unique approach to facilitating theatre work in detention centers. Each practitioner has strong convictions and an expansive knowledge around issues regarding the prison system. Each practitioner was also inspired to do prison theatre in very different ways.

Walker, in particular, had a huge impact on the structure of this project. Having worked with her on a previous research experience, I was fortunate enough to have developed a fruitful relationship with Walker outside CPAP. In fact, on more than one occasion she graciously opened up her home to me, where I was able to spend a significant amount of time getting to know her. She shared with me great stories about theatrical adventures in using theatre for social change. I was strongly impacted by her

⁷ See page 79 for more detail on ritual phases using Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process*.

revelation as a former Living Theatre member in the 1960s.⁸ I did not record her narratives about her work with the Living Theatre; at the time these conversation seemed slightly irrelevant to my particular interest in prison theatre. Furthermore, her stories were personal, I felt honored by her willingness to share with me, and did not want to hinder a developing bond (or miss out on the juicy insider details of her experiences), by objectifying her life as data. Regardless, after one of my visits she lent me a book called *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*. The book offers a detailed description of one of their most well-known productions: “Paradise Now.” What is incredibly interesting about this book is its opening statement, explaining: “Writing down ‘Paradise Now’ did not begin until six months after the premiere. This means that it was not read by the actors until more than a year later, when the writing was complete, more than fifty performances after the premiere” (Malina and Beck 1971). I did not come to realize the importance of this statement until the final phases of this project came into fruition.

“Paradise Now” was devised from Kabbalah, Tantric, and Hasidic rituals and traditions. The performance itself was organized through a Rung system and integrated Tantric chakra elements and ten holy Kabbalah attributes to shape each “scene.”⁹ I place quotation marks around the word “scene” because their use of ritual elements transformed their performance into a ritual process itself. At the same time I include the conventional term “scene” to emphasize that each Rung of the performance inspired the

⁸ The Living Theatre Company was a radical performance group founded in 1947 during the avant-garde, expressionist movement in art.

⁹ A “Rung,” as defined by Malina and Beck in *Paradise Now* is “a ladder that connects earth to heaven” (8) in Hasidic Teachings.

intentional use of theatrical aesthetics for generating various qualities of affect. The goal, as stated by Walker herself, was to inspire a peaceful revolution by offering audiences embodied experiences in liberation, through theatrical engagements. The actors “take as a premise that no revolutionary action can be fulfilled externally (socially / economically / politically) without a parallel change within the revolutionary himself” (Malina and Beck 1971). Thus, the overarching mission inherent within this performance was not merely to express a need for social change, but to produce an environment in which participants can “be the change [they] wish to see in the world” (Mahatma Gandhi). The opening statement in *Paradise Now* reflects this mission by emphasizing the embodied liberatory experience (which is fluid from person to person), and the process by which this performance was constituted through ritual repetition. Had the actors read a written translation of the performance before it evolved into what we understand it to be today, the text might have served as a panoptic device itself by influencing future performances, encouraging them to fit into a rigid structure.¹⁰

It is this very mission that drives my own work here; though, I do not follow the same ritual structure and chakra system that was used in “Paradise Now.” I have appropriated a yogic chakra system for each section of this thesis in order to produce a written performance of ritual. Chakras are defined as metaphysical energy sources found within the body (along the spine), by which we are all connected to each other and the universe. When accessing chakra energies, “[t]he spiritual task is to draw this energy

¹⁰ I use “panoptic tools” and “policing tools” interchangeably. See chapter II (page 23) for and in depth explanation of the panopticon.

upward from the lower to higher centers” (Meadow 1993). By doing this, each chakra helps to awaken the “crown” chakra, allowing for self-realization and a higher state of consciousness. Though the use of chakras traditionally stem from Eastern practices in spirituality, they have become widely used and referenced within Western societies. From use as alternative holistic healing guides in psychology, to physiological expressions of yoga exercise practices, chakra systems are seen as engendering transformative qualities for the mind, body, and spirit. Here I use the yogic chakra system symbolically—as each chakra conveniently (or perhaps serendipitously) defines the purpose of each chapter in this project—to give my reader something of a performative, embodied learning experience, in conversation with the devastating reality of the United States prison system.

What is life, but a series of rituals that constitute our daily process of being? Rituals are by nature performative, in that their repetitive actions generate meaning and purpose, which shape how we experience and understand the world around us. The “Introduction” of this thesis is the root chakra of the ritual to which I invite my readers. The root chakra, in spiritual practice, allows us to begin with our most basic instincts upon which we will build. The energy of the root chakra is not conscious; rather it is associated with fear, paranoia, and our basic survival instincts. The root chakra “offers a call to the ‘dance of life,’ but also reflects the readiness with which one can ‘run scared’” (Meadow 1993). It is here I introduce the “root” of our issue; an issue that has led me to prison theatre—from my own personal life experiences with the prison-industrial complex, to the larger issues that compel me to choreograph a new “dance of life.” The

root is a question: how can one transgress conventional systems of policing when we in the “free world” are also being policed on a daily basis?

My section on the “Prison-Industrial Complex” is represented by the sacral chakra. It is connected to sexuality and pleasure. Meadow calls this chakra the “genital” chakra, explaining its symbolic association with fertility and orgies (Meadow 1993). Of course, when one thinks of prison it is not generally regarded as an erotic or sexual site (though, the incarcerated body has been fetishized in entertainment). Think of this chakra as illuminating human desire and its (re)production of systems that appease such desires. “Lust, greed, and craving for sensual delights are the predominant states of mind here” (Meadow 1993), and are aspects of humanity that have helped lead us into a state of mass incarceration. Water is the element most closely associated with this chakra, and is understood as an element that changes form to fit any shape in which it is contained, yet has the capacity to cleanse and carry away with it what is unwanted. Within this sacral chakra I place the prison as container, parched with a thirst for power that moves water elements (prisoners) as it sees fit. In order to contain water, it diminishes its purifying qualities, and often produces liquid stagnation that aids in the growth of bacteria and parasites. Power, for instance, can be both bacterial and parasitic. Those in power grow sick with greed while slyly feeding off the weak and ignorant to maintain strength.

When the sacral chakra is blocked we often find ourselves under great influence of sexual desire, and pleasures guided by greed. Awakening the sacral chakra helps cleanse these desires, and transforms our needs into spiritual necessities that are more

conducive to generating a humane society. I open the sacral chakra by illustrating the particulars of how, on a societal level, it has been blocked over history. Concluding the sacral chakra I offer a metaphorical cleansing with an explanation of the importance of performance and embodied knowledge production. Additionally, I situate my research within a family trope, positioning society as extended family; this family should most certainly be valued and respected as kin.

In the third chapter, we enter the solar plexus chakra, encompassing Act I of the two-act script included in this thesis. This chakra is connected to the “autonomic nervous system, and emotional arousal” (Meadow 1993). To harness solar plexus energies is to illuminate that which might seem invisible, and purge that which impedes harmonious relationships. In the solar plexus you will find the first part of the aforementioned script, one I devised using theory, field notes, and personal narratives. Though in the sacral chakra I map out the evolution of power systems as they are performed through punishment, it is within the solar plexus chakra that I make these systems visible and relevant, through honing affect. Additionally, this chakra illuminates an embodied ritual process in which prison theatre facilitators undergo in working towards a more humane criminal justice system. As they gain a heightened awareness of the power structures that move around them inside the prison and in the free world, they develop interpersonal tactics for transgressing obstacles impeding social change.

Next is the heart chakra, Act II of the script, which is associated with coming into adulthood. In this chakra one is said to learn how to accept heartache without moving into a realm of apathy. Unlike the first act, which focuses on the prison theatre

practitioner's ritual experiences of advocacy, the second act turns its focus towards the audience. The heart chakra shows the prison theatre practitioner's achieved *communitas* with inmates, suggesting she has gained a deeper understanding of oppression and injustices. Without having experienced oppression, it is difficult to see its material effects in the world around us, and to act on them in an ethical manner. She does not allow heartache to defeat her; she moves forward instead, by recruiting those within her free-communities to share the burdens she now shares with incarcerated people. In this act the prison theatre practitioner aims to suggest that "[t]he only chance we have for social justice is through making the oppressions of others our own," (Johnson 2012). The same ritual process seen in the first act is repeated during the second act, highlighting the prison theatre practitioner's interpersonal tactics as developed in act one. This chapter most clearly reveals the purpose of this thesis.

The solar plexus and heart chakra performance' scenes draw from Victor Turner's theory of liminality and *communitas*.¹¹ I use *The Ritual Process* as a means to interpret flows of affect within the field, through Arcak's narratives, and ultimately my own affect. As follows, in these two chakras you will enter into a meta-ritual performance in this thesis (that is, a guided ritual experience of my field and data, placed within this larger written ritual performance). I used ethnographic field notes, Arcak's personal narratives, theoretical quotes, and rhetorical tools in composing the dialogue and "scenic" imagery. The script is written to be either read or performed. Recognize how each chakra chapter opens with an italicized quote. Consider these quotes to be

¹¹ See note 6.

“stage directions” for navigating each chakra. This should also prompt your understanding of italicized text within the scripted performance as valuable information, signifying both theory and processes of developing affect.

The fifth chapter is located at the throat chakra as a performance “talkback.” This chakra “is located where nutrition is taken in; psychologically it has to do with accepting nurture, being receptive, and acquiring a full sense of trust” (Meadow 1993). I offer this talkback as a means to hone trust in the prison theatre facilitator and her personal narratives. Here I give an in depth analysis of the performance and theoretical interpretation of my interlocutor’s personal narratives. With the throat chakra “one ‘has space’ in which to unfold, begins to realize one’s true identity, and trusts in the goodness of that which lies behind the manifest self” (Meadow 1993). Here, you are asked accept the prison theatre practitioner’s nurturing stories, being receptive of their lessons.

The third eye chakra, or what Meadows calls the “eyebrow” chakra, follows the throat chakra with a conclusion. In the third eye chakra, one is said to have “perfect control over the personality, and receives the unconditional imperative of the higher self, which is experienced as a freely chosen destiny” (Meadow 1993). Here it is said we are able to live free of desires, which are often the root of greed and suffering. It is within this chakra I expose my process of tapping into my own intuitive senses, through a discussion on how the collaborative aspects of devising the two act performance awakened a deeper understanding of my own embodied knowledge processes. In the third eye chakra I offer these final thoughts as a springboard, allowing you to tap into your own intuitive senses, and act upon them with an “integrated awareness.” In spiritual

practice, awakening the third eye chakra suggests one is now in a position to access self-realization in the final, “crown” chakra. Neither Meadow nor I can fully describe this chakra.

In the yogic chakra system, to awaken the crown chakra is to reach a state of “kundalini” (spiritual enlightenment). This project does not aim towards offering a symbolic or embodied sense of kundalini. To do so would be a fallacy, and counterproductive. While this project does advocate an awareness of the power of affect and personal narrative, it does not claim to have produced significant change to the issues that perpetuate our flawed prison system. Such change must come from collective action. To reach a state of kundilini is to have a heightened awareness of being inherently connected to the universe—which undoubtedly includes prisoners. Thus, with such an awareness, one finds themselves imminently bearing the burdens of all things unjust, whilst wearing the crown of that which is good. By omitting the crown chakra from this written performance, I’m asking you to reach your own state of kundilini in regards to the U.S. prison-industrial complex; by which we can, together, bring about substantial positive change.

You will find that this piece, as a whole, both resists and harnesses paradox. *Liminal Showers* illuminates how stormy weathers can be cleansing, especially for a frog.¹²

¹² You’ll understand the significance of the frog while in the solar plexus chakra.

II. SACRAL CHAKRA: CONTEXT& HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

“What you ‘have within your grasp’ is a desire that can be realized. We call an excessively appropriating person ‘grabby,’ and one whose taking is concerned only for self a ‘snatch.’”

I work towards producing an interactive, written, ritual performance that might inspire a peaceful revolution in the U.S. prison system. This performance rests on the potential readers have to reach their own “ah-ha!” moments in their conversations with the text. In fact, it was necessary for me to come to my own conclusions through a process of performance as research, as there were many encounters I had in the field (prison) that left me without the words by which I might communicate my experience. This happened many times while working with Cory Arcak in the TreeHouse Project in particular.

Due to the extensive amount of data I collected, and the limitations of compiling this data into a thesis, I made the difficult decision to focus my thesis specifically on Arcak’s TreeHouse Project. I mentioned CPAP and Voices Inside as a means to both situate myself within this project—I am no stranger to the world of prison theatre—and also to give heed to Walker and Henson who have helped shape my understanding of that world and my data, by generously welcoming me as both a participant in and researcher of their programs. My work with CPAP and Voices Inside have been invaluable to me as a theatre artist and will help form my own path as a prison theatre practitioner. Walker and Henson’s programs also informed the oddly intense emotional struggles I encountered with the TreeHouse Project, which I had not experienced with other programs.

Arcak's story and work is arguably the most complex in terms of intimacy, tactics, and practice. That is, she allowed herself a level of vulnerability in personal narrative, as well as in practice while working in her field. When she explained to me why her program is called the TreeHouse Project, she said treehouses represent a safe space, a home away from home, and a place in which you feel accepted and loved as an insider of a group with whom you share the space. Arcak wanted to create a program that mirrored these ideas, particularly because she was initially interested in working with youths in foster care. This, and her own life experiences, generated an understanding of the importance of home and nurturing as imperative to a positive and productive upbringing. Arcak has her own unique understanding of obstacles, struggle, and triumph, coming from a low-income background, and raising a son while she worked to achieve her goals. I was surprised to find out that both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees are in Anthropology. After ten years working in anthropology she returned to academia to work towards a Doctoral degree in Education. Arcak now considers her inherent obligation to help those who are underprivileged a privilege. At the same time, her privilege does not mean she is not liable make mistakes as she willingly accepts her obligation as an activist for silenced voices.

Arcak would not define herself as an activist, something I inquired about in our first interview. Facilitating prison arts was not a field in which she had planned to enter. Regardless, when I asked her to be an interlocutor in my research on prison arts practitioners, without hesitation she replied "yes." Arcak is the type of woman who enjoys going into new projects blind. Going in blind, she explains, allows her to bend the

rules. Little did she know this mentality would put her “behind bars.” My goal in our first interview was to get a broad sense of where she comes from, what she sees in her future, and how she places herself in the prison system today. Her willingness to share more intimate experiences with me during our meeting left me profoundly affected by her stories. Sitting in an eclectically decorated café, with a mixture of alternative and jazz music floating in the background, we conversed effortlessly for nearly two and a half hours. She has an uncanny ability to make a person feel comfortable and important. This seemingly inherent skill is necessary when working with “at-risk” youths. I had to ask myself: Is prison arts her “calling”?

Early on in my interview with Arcak I asked her if she felt she was called in some way to prison arts. She explained that she has always loved art, and she has always loved kids, but really it's just the right thing to do. She did, however, describe a defining moment: In her tenth year working in aquatic anthropology, hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, displacing hundreds of thousands. The company she was working for volunteered employees to help with victim relief services; Arcak energetically accepted an assignment. She was asked to serve as an advocate for a 12-year-old boy coming from an underprivileged background, who had also been separated from his parents. The story of her relationship with the boy, how she situates herself in his life, and the way she allows this story to unravel during our interview captures intricate intersections of identity, affect, and power in Arcak as a prison arts practitioner.

In addition to Arcak’s unique demeanor, the TreeHouse Project is also the most diverse in what she offers participants. She allows detainees to shape what the program

will look like for each particular group, and does not limit their artistic exploration to any one medium of art; be it painting, poetry, storytelling, pottery, dance, singing, etc... She simply works hard with detainees to create an environment that will help them access the specific tools they need for self-discovery. Working alongside Arcak challenged me immensely as an artist and a student, as those two identities within me often seemed in conflict with one another. While all three of the programs in which I worked moved me in profound ways, I found it most difficult to relay my experiences with the TreeHouse Project, in a way that fully grasps the nature and flow of affect in that site.

I focused on the TreeHouse Project also because of one extraordinary detail: it is implemented within a residential treatment center (RTC) for boys who are also involved with Child Protection Services (CPS) and/or the foster care system.¹³ Up until this point, I could only assume the inmates I had worked with in the past might have come from difficult backgrounds. In the RTC, it was often a prerequisite for placement in the center. I struggled with this information as it heightened my consciousness of my privileged position, and challenged my “objectivity” while collecting ethnographic data. At the same time, this struggle informed my understanding of Arcak’s personal narratives and how she uses affect inside and outside of the RTC. She is very good at developing a sense of trust with the boys, often taking on mothering roles momentarily. Arcak uses

¹³ For the purposes of maintaining RTC confidentiality, I do not reference the institution by name. The RTC in which the TreeHouse Project is implemented is a privately owned detention home for boys. Technically speaking it is not a juvenile hall; it is an intervention for “at-risk” youth who are potentially headed for a state run detention facility. Regardless, the boys are kept under constant surveillance, expected to attend counseling sessions, are separated by levels or behavioral risks, and considered to be delinquent.

storytelling to personalize the larger issues and structures of power in motion; capitalizes on affect, placing herself under scrutiny by sharing deeply personal experiences; and calls listeners to question the roles they play in perpetuating larger social issues.

For many, the prison system is a continuous cycle of oppression; a revolving door for low-income, undereducated, minority “citizens.” It currently silences over 5.8 million US voices, including currently incarcerated people, and those on probation and parole (Chung 2014). While involved in the penal system offenders are barred from their right to vote, experiencing “civil death.”¹⁴ This is the system in which Arcak simultaneously works in accordance with and against. While working towards her PhD, she is an instructor in Ethics for freshman corps at Texas A&M University. Arcak in many ways supports the panoptic system, as the education system is a huge component of policing behavior and privileged learning methods. She also maintains a heightened level of consciousness regarding her privileged position, the access she has to education, and the power of her voice. She is well traveled and has developed a keen sense of the complex ideological intersections poverty, class, and gender play in ethics and justice. Moreover, she allows herself a certain amount of space to be affectively driven, emphatically binding herself to those who lack voice.

This brings me back to the specific problem at hand, the guiding force for the development of my methodology in writing this piece, and the seemingly irreconcilable paradox that prison theatre practitioners must face. It all began with Foucault...

14 In "Performing Civil Death: The Medea Project and Theater for Incarcerated Women" Nina Billone argues incarcerated people experience a “civil death” both in prison and upon release. Once released from prison inmates are prohibited from participating in civil liberties such as voting, government help (i.e. welfare), and struggle to find work.

Before the prison was established as the main source of policing society, punishment was a public affair. Villagers came together to witness spectacles of execution and torture. Men and women were stoned, dismembered, and hanged (among other forms of torture) for their wrong doings. The condemned were both punished and interpellated as an “expression of the power that punishes” (Foucault 1995). During the 18th century Puritanical era, spectators were encouraged to scrutinize the criminal and witness redemption, seeing their participation as a practice of moral cleansing for both the condemned, as well as themselves. Public executions were ritual affairs for political operations to spread terror amongst audience members. Power was overtly displayed and fused with religion, aiding in reaffirming structures of power and the maintenance of social order.

During the second half of the 18th century, public execution had reached its cap. People began disputing execution performances because punishments were being unevenly distributed. Those in power were recognizably delivering the most barbaric punishments to the poor and disadvantaged, while allowing the elite to slip by with little more than a slap on the wrist for similar crimes. Spectators, who had never been discouraged from identifying with the condemned, began cringing at now unjustifiable spectacles of torture. Public executions, which engaged spectators as participants in the punishment, now became expressions of the immoral power that punishes and a threat to their own moral stature. In essence, they realized they had been drinking tainted water. In order for jurisdictions to maintain power, punishment had to be moved into private settings, and sentences could not surpass the severity of the crime. Additionally, in order

to insure the fair treatment of all, execution rituals evolved into what we know today as criminal trials. That is, moral cleansing was no longer fused to the punishment itself, but to the collective process of deliberation over the offender's innocence.

This evolution of punishment came with its own consequential drawbacks. In fact, it has been argued that the transformation of punishment from public spectacle to private deliberation resulted in an even less humane system.¹⁵ Furthermore, while spectators might have been well intentioned, their demands for a more humane system of punishment did little to affect the jurisdictional strategy for maintaining power by preying on the weak.¹⁶ Rather, injustices within the criminal justice system were now hidden from the public eye, and new forms of using criminality to reaffirm power structures were developed, and worse, cloaked by seemingly ethical social progress. The power container was actually widened. Spectators were no longer in a position to be cleansed; rather, they became the *plastic* by which the container was shaped, and could be molded to fit other various forms. The development of incarceration as an alternative form of punishment against crime created moral hierarchies separating society and the convicted, and prompted the development of a system that would eventually be harnessed as a source of economic gain. In short, punishment shifted from corporeal treatment, to psychological treatment through "rehabilitation." Today, we see this system

¹⁵ Dwight Conquergood argues in "Lethal Theatre" that the prison system has become less humane through its transformation. He focuses on the ritual aspects of our criminal justice system that dehumanize offenders, and help perpetuate racial disparities.

¹⁶ In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau defines a tactic as "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus... [t]he space of a tactic is the space of the other" (de Certeau 1984). These are the actions one makes when opportunities arise within the larger system of which one must adhere.

in the United States as a prison-industrial complex, which is tightly woven into a neoliberal system of capital production, perpetuated through a panoptic lens constructed out of society itself.

This history largely comes from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, in which he maps out a genealogy of the evolution of punishment from corporeal to psychological. Foucault offers the panopticon as a rhetorical tool for explaining how society supports the prison system by policing each other on a daily basis. A panopticon is an architectural structure, built with the capabilities to survey inmates from every direction, but into which prisoners cannot see. The idea was to build a structure that would perform policing capabilities by its presence alone. Without knowing when they were being watched, inmates could only assume they were never left unattended. Rhetorically, from the medical industry to education; from religious institutions to the entertainment industry, we are raised in a panoptic system that polices certain behaviors. These panoptic devices generate discursive acts that produce ideologically normalized body politics to which we must adhere, should we like to avoid public ridicule or incarceration.

Just as we saw the Puritans grow uncomfortable by being hailed as participants in acts of gruesomely unjust punishment rituals, we seem to have come full circle as history repeats itself. Our post-modern social climate has created a system that not only views the greater population as tools for everyday policing, but has done so through ideological

state apparatus.¹⁷ Since punishment is no longer administered corporeally, and has been refocused towards psychological rehabilitation, criminal rhetoric and mass-mediated ideologies of right and wrong are dispersed into society and validated through repressive state apparatus.¹⁸ Furthermore, with the “death” of a grand narrative (iconic to post-modern theory), and the “separation” of religion and state, people now regard mainstream society as a valid source of moral and social guidance. No longer are people looking towards family and God for approval. No longer is social mentality driven by reverence towards the collective. Today, individuality is encouraged; however, with never ending lifestyle possibilities and basic human desires for connection and affirmation, one eventually turns towards their peers and those in power to help shape their belief systems. It is here we see again a call for society to participate in processes of punishment, only this time in many ways unbeknownst to us.

The impact of this call is not visible outside of the prison as it is dangerously rooted in the psyche. Powerful narratives move through people who are told and re-told what criminal looks like, with no unmediated space to witness its material effects outside systems of power. It is because of this I have chosen to place performance and theory in conversation with each other for the bulk of this thesis. There are physical boundaries

¹⁷ In “Ideology and ideological state apparatus,” Louis Althusser identifies two different sources of power operating in the maintenance of reproduction: the ideological state apparatus (ISA) and the repressive state apparatus (RSA). The ISA includes institutions that teach, affirm, and reproduce acceptable social behaviors. Such institutions include family, religion, and the academy to name a few. The ISA is invaluable to maintaining the power of the RSA.

¹⁸ The repressive state apparatus, as defined by Althusser, includes the government, administration, police force, and of course the prison (among other institutions). The RSA operates to correct those who stray from the social norms threatening the power of the state itself, which is largely supported by capitalist productions

that cannot be crossed in advocating for prison reform; however, through performance, affect can be harnessed as a subversive tactic against the system. Just as Arcak uses her stories and experiences within her communities to provoke change through critical thought, so too will I in this thesis, use “performative writing” in a performance of embodied writing and theory. D. Soyini Madison offers a format in which I can engage embodied writing and performance, without abandoning academic conventions required to constitute a legitimate production of scholarship in the academy.¹⁹

Performance is ephemeral. Those three words have been ringing painfully in my ears since my first semester in graduate school. “Performance is ephemeral.” It cannot be archived. It cannot be captured. It cannot be contained. Performance cannot be lived twice in the same exact way. It is even more fluid than water. Just as Heraclitus once said “you cannot put your foot in the same river twice;” you cannot relive experience in the same exact way twice.

Performance studies discourse encompasses a multitude of perspectives that address and manipulate this idea of ephemerality in performance. Richard Schechner’s theory of “restored behavior” aims at exposing how embodied knowledge is passed down through performance and performative experiences. These performances range from daily habits to theatrically stylized productions, that help shape the social world as a whole.²⁰ Schechner’s theory both reconciles and illustrates the issues of ephemerality

¹⁹ Scene two in both the solar plexus and heart chakras draw from D. Soyini Madison’s “Performing theory/embodied writing.” I offer a detailed explanation in the talkback.

²⁰ Schechner’s explains these behaviors as performing ourselves, restoration of a historical event, “or—most often—a restoration of a past that never was” and the performance that will never be. For the last restored behavior he offers “workshops” as “as if” performances for events that will never happen (Schechner 1985).

in which I have been grappling (and so the paradox deepens). Restored behaviors, he argues, are responsible for shaping every single person's daily life. It perpetuates daily rituals, and informs how we present ourselves to the world in any given circumstance or cultural context. People develop behavioral patterns and ritual performances through direct interactions with those around them. With this in mind, it is hard to accept performance as ephemeral; it lives in the body and is archived through its reproduction and, in many cases, it's dismissal as performance. In other words, behaviors that become second nature and seem to live in the subconscious, have all been learned and finally contained within the body as an archive that continually informs an ever growing bodily discourse. Just as a library archives written theory, philosophy, and historical events that continually inform research in the academy, the body archives information that informs how we navigate our physical and spiritual worlds.

At the same time, each restored behavior follows a pattern by which the resulting performance, no matter how closely it replicates the original, is still its *own* performance. That is, if nothing else changes, time most certainly will have moved forward; context will undoubtedly have been altered. Indeed, the same is true with the archived text, which always undergoes interpretation through the process of reading. Moreover, as time passes, information expands and technology grows, and our world context changes as do perspectives and processes of interpretation. Text is no less in danger of losing its original meaning than performance.

This issue of ephemerality is something that weighs heavily on me as a scholar, and problematizes my work greatly. Over the past four years I have been conducting

research on prison theatre, investigating prison theatre practitioners' roles within the field as well as beyond prison walls. I interrogate their position as both an insider and an outsider; as someone who has experientially engaged its bodily discourse through facilitating performance behind bars, while I am also inextricably tied to my privileged position as researcher: traditionally, a person with a lens and mind informed by text.

I began research on prison theatre as an undergraduate student, which eventually drove me to devise a performance project on this topic with an interactive performance troupe I started with a friend. With the troupe, I facilitated the beginnings of a devised (original, collaborative performance) project we performed inside a local juvenile hall. The creative process was invigorating, thought provoking, and in many ways rewarding for everyone who participated. The logistical aspects of gaining entrance and access to the youths, on the other hand, was nothing short of frustrating. Yet, at the end of the day, what was more frustrating than the institutional setbacks and demands in which I was forced to navigate, was the fact that I would find it impossible to translate the entirety of my experiences to the page. Words could not contain what I had learned with my body. What I had felt, and what had moved me viscerally would be lost in text.

In expanding my research in grad school I came to question both the institutional boundaries that complicate prison theatre work, as well as the invisible social (psychological) boundaries that aid in policing bodies and perpetuate ideological conventions, both in the free world, and inside the prison itself. The latter has been a particularly difficult question to address, as much of my understanding of social policing processes has been learned experientially. Consciously embodied – so called

“ephemeral” – engagements with social constraints led me to the realization that there are many ways of asserting power that reinforce convention through movements of affect. Affective flows, which have material consequences (both good and bad), are continually moving through our communities helping to guide our actions and shape the ideologies in which we subscribe. With this, I feel burdened with the responsibility to produce a piece of scholarship that engages my research data through text as well as performance. I accept this to be my obligation because I see no better way to share the embodied knowledge I have acquired. I use this approach in order to support the claims I am making to my fullest abilities. By bringing text and performance together, I offer a piece of scholarship that attempts to draw from the strengths each component engenders in order to minimize their individual and problematic weaknesses.

This is not merely a work of academic scholarship destined for library shelves, and waiting to be hailed by those interested in prison theatre work or performance studies; though, it will certainly claim that position with pride alongside the many intellectual masters who have helped shape this piece, should the opportunity arise. This is a performance of embodied writing and theatrical engagement with theory, my field, and affective manipulation, meant to *do* the hailing, and transgress textual and institutional boundaries by permeating bodies and planting seeds for bodily archivization. Not all seeds sprout and bloom, but with a little water, those that do take root, grow and mature to create more seeds. This performance is intentional, not merely an aesthetic display of the data I have collected; nor an abstract rendition of my experiences in the field. It is an imperative attempt to actively engage my community to

be critical of our criminal justice system and the powers that govern our daily lives; question our own positions in its perpetuation; and extend the platform and mission of my interlocutor. This is a performance that gives a voice to incarcerated individuals, who may never be heard otherwise. It has been shaped and guided by the obstacles and tactics my interlocutor uses to navigate her role as a prison arts facilitator. It has also been shaped and guided by my own obstacles, created by the traditional (text centered) academy, and the tactics I have used to transgress boundaries that threatened the essence of this project.

And so the showers begin...

III. SOLAR PLEXUS CHAKRA: ACT I

“There is danger of enchantment with power and grandeur.”

Scene 1: Pre-liminal Conundrums

A blank canvas... space... space contained by four black walls, bare (besides a few black curtains blanketing three sides, and a fourth, naked wall inviting guests to decorate its lonesome). This space begs for manipulation, for companionship; it's greatest purpose is a rite of passage. It is the passage; one must earn their rite to leave. Upon entering this space, “guests” become participants in a ritual experiment on transgressing boundaries through affect. They are neither audience, nor performers, neither spectators nor participants; they are invaluable agents in a process of change. If one must label guests upon entrance, they are merely “actors” in the Boalian sense.²¹ That is, they are performing for the purposes of being performed on; lacking critical engagement with themselves, and their positions must be altered before they leave. For the purposes of eliminating confusion, throughout this script they will be called “guest-actors.”

Doors open, MISS stands outside the entrance, cheerfully greeting guest-actors as they enter. MISS is dressed in all black, wearing a black sweater which can be unbuttoned down the front. As guest-actors enter the space they are confronted by five JOKERS (again, in the Boalian sense), also dressed in all black, with sweaters that unbutton down the front, and the addition of black joker hats. They create boundaries in which guest-actors must navigate in order to reach their seats. The boundaries vary in appearance: some seemingly invisible created by light variances, some transparent like Plexiglas; some obvious like a moveable wall, or a set of bars; a chain; and some made out of the JOKERS' own bodies. Upstage left (USL), hanging from the ceiling, is a hammock. Upstage right (USR) is a small prison cell holding NARRATOR who tries desperately to make eye-contact with entering guest-actors.

JOKERS guide guest-actors to what seems to be pre-assigned seating arrangements. They are separated by attire and by race. Those who are dressed nicely encounter smaller boundaries. Those who are dressed down find themselves navigating what feels like a maze of obstacles. Those who are light-skinned are seated to the right, people of color are seated to the left. Guest-actor racial separation is challenged by placing a few White-skinned folks within the minority group. Many are separated from the company with whom they arrived. This discomfort is intentional, and necessary.

After our space is filled and bodies are situated, doors close. A shockingly loud sound of a door slam is heard. Seconds after, UNCLE SAM's arm emerges from the hammock. Throughout the performance, his face is never seen; he is only heard. In his hand hangs a speaker, at which point the sound of a prison alarm, signaling “count” is heard at an

²¹ See page 86 for an explanation of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed.

insultingly loud volume. JOKERs 3, 4, & 5 begin removing obstacles from the space, then exit completely once finished; once offstage, the alarm is silenced. During this action, JOKERs 1 & 2 approach guest-actors with clipboards in hand, counting heads.

JOKER 1

COUNT!

JOKER 2

COUNT!

NARRATOR

Initiation. 7:00 PM (this time should reference the actual time of performance. NARRATOR reminds guest-actors of the actual time of day throughout the duration of the performance).

MISS rushes into the space, she sits with the right side of the audience. JOKER 1 makes eye contact with her and glares. MISS stands and rushes to sit on with the left side of the audience. JOKER 2 makes eye contact with her and chuckles demeaningly. MISS stands a last time, and moves into the middle.

Lights dim to “half” above guest-actors. If conversations are heard due to the lack of blackout, JOKERs may adlib, speaking directly to those who are talking, asking them to be quiet. This should be done with a balance between aggressive authority, and enough sensitivity so as not to cause embarrassment. Audience members must not be completely alienated from the experience; rather, encouraged to be present and accepting of the situation.

MISS slowly begins to sit where she stands, as there is no chair; she is not sure what else to do...

JOKER 2

(Addressing guest-actors) Stand please.

MISS slowly stands back up, as the instruction occurred before she had even reached a seated position...

JOKER 1

(Addressing all guest-actors in a militaristic fashion) Can you hear?! STAND YOUR ASSES UP! NOW! MOVE! MOVE! MOVE!

JOKERs 1 & 2 continue counting and re-counting guest-actors. At the same time NARRATOR speaks the following with a Beckett (absurdist) quality: quickly, and in a monotone voice. It should be spoken in less than 20 seconds.

NARRATOR

“Ten years that the language is gone,
that there has entered in its place
this atmospheric thunder,
 this lighting,
facing the aristocratic pressuration of beings,
of all the noble beings
 of the butt,
cunt, of the prick,
of the lingouette,
of the plalouettee
 plaloulette.
 pactoulette,

JOKER 1, pulls a bag of small cookies out from his/her pocket and begins to unwrap it obnoxiously. NARRATOR speaks louder, attempting to outweigh this disturbance.

of the tegumentary trance,
of the pellicle,
racial nobles of the corporeal erotic,
against me, simple virgin of the body,
ten years that I once again blew up the Middle Ages,
with its nobles, its judges, its lookout,
 its priests above all,
 its churches,
 its cathedrals,
 its vicars,
 its white wafers.

JOKER 1 places one cookie on his tongue with a Eucharistic quality, and chews loudly...

How?
With an anti-logical,
 anti-philosophical,
 anti-intellectual,
 anti-*dialectical*
 blow of the tongue
with my black pencil pressed down
 and that's it.”²²

²² Excerpts taken from [Untitled] by Antonin Artaud, with original poetic transcription and italics. Permission for use of block quotes in scholarship is not required by JSTOR unless published or produced outside Texas A&M University. NARRATOR's quoted lines for the remainder of this scene are also from this source.

JOKER 2

Hands up! Put them up high, palms facing forward.

JOKER 1

Come on now! We don't have all day! Hands up!

ACTOR 2

Good, okay, you can put them down. Sit.

While JOKERs 1 & 2 share notes and paperwork, NARRATOR speaks the following in the same style as heard before...

NARRATOR

“For the real work is in its clouds.
Words, no,
arid patches of a breath which gives its full
but there where only the Last Judgment will be able to decide between values,
the *evidences*,
as far as the text is concerned,
in the moulted blood of what tide
will I be able to make heard
the corrosive structure,
I say hear
the constructive structure,
there where the drawing
point by point
is only the restitution of a drilling,
of the advance of a drill in the underworld of the sempiternal latent body.
But what a logomachy, no?
Couldn't you light up your lantern a bit more, Mr. Artaud.
My lantern?
I say
that look ten years with my breath
I've been breathing hard forms,
compact,
opaque,
unbridled,
without archings
in the limbo of my body not made
and which finds itself hence made
and that I find every time the 10,000 beings to criticize me,
to obturate the attempt of the edge of a pierced infinite.”

JOKER 1

(Speaking directly to one individual seated on the right side of the guest-actor space) Excuse me sir/ma'am.... Yes you in the *(reference shirt color, or other identifying characteristic)*. Can you please stand back up? *(Waits for "actor" to stand, scrutinizes him/her visually)* What is your name?

JOKER 2

(Speaking directly over the guest-actor with no regard to his/her answer) Participant number 1605342. FOUNDATIONAL panoptic lens piece.

JOKER 1

(To JOKER 2) Yea, no s/he is supposed to be around here *(referencing clipboard as if there was a diagram)*, this isn't going to work we need her/him here.

JOKER 2

But what if—

JOKER 1

(Furious) NO "BUTS," WE NEED HER/HIM HERE!

JOKER 2

(To guest-actor) Yea, you're in the wrong place honey. You're completely out of bounds *(chuckling a little)*. You're in the wrong place. Didn't mean to mislead ya, but not everyone can work that angle of the lens. This system is a group effort. Everyone must participate, and everyone must fulfill their particular task... Nice try. Please move and find a seat on the left side of the audience. Any seat. Yep... Yes, any seat. *(As s/he finds a seat)* NO! No-no-no-no not that one! *(Pause, then laughs)* Aahhh! Nah, I'm kidding. Just a little joke. That's good. Good. *(Check notes)* Thank you.

JOKER 1

(Calling on another guest-actor seated on the right side) Excuse me, can you please stand? What is your name?

JOKER 2

(Again, speaking over his/her response) Participant 1603437 *(referencing clipboard, sharing findings with JOKER 1, then turning focus back towards guest-actor)* I'm sorry, please turn to the side. Good. Back. Nice. Other side. Good, good. You may face us. Wow.

JOKER 1

Come here.

JOKER 2

(Seductively) Come here. (Once guest-actor has entered the “stage”) That jacket (or other identifying article of clothing) is BANGIN’! You look good! (Places arm around guest-actor as if they are old pals).

JOKER 1

Real nice. *(Addressing entire group)* Can we please draw your attention here towards—

JOKER 2

Participant 1603437.

JOKER 1

Take notes!

MISS slowly stands. She has grown uncomfortable.

JOKER 2

Mental images!

JOKER 1

This is what we will call a MODEL participant. *(Addressing guest-actor on stage)* Why don’t you give us a little “catwalk?” Go ahead, show us what you got!

JOKERS 1 & 2 continue to pressure the guest-actor on stage until s/he “walks the catwalk.” If the guest-actor presents herself as female, her image should be sexualized in commentary (not enough to be humiliating; rather, guest-actor should be flattered). If guest-actor presents himself as male, his image should be masculinized in commentary. Once this act is completed, JOKER 2 puts his hand out for a “low-five” and fist bump from JOKER 1 before s/he continues with...

Go ahead and be seated.

As the guest-actor moves back to his/her seat, a loud hiccup is heard from NARRATOR who grabs his/her throat as though s/he cannot speak. Until JOKER 1 exists, the hiccups and panic intensify, and morph into frog sounds. The first hiccup signals MISS to slyly sneak behind the audience, making her way towards NARRATOR’s cell.

JOKER 2

(Addressing “guest-actors” in a militaristic manner, yelling the following commands)
These are your seats for the duration of your time here!

JOKER 1

Do not move!

NARRATOR

Hiccup.

JOKER 2

DO NOT QUESTION THEM!

JOKER 1

Do not question us.

NARRATOR

Riccup.

JOKER 2

Turn off your phones!

JOKER 1

Turn off your beepers.

NARRATOR

Ribcup.

JOKER 2

(To JOKER 1) Yo, beepers aren't really a thing anymore—

NARRATOR

Ribbup... (NARRATOR holds breath)

JOKER 1

(Angry) JUST TURN EVERYTHING OFF AND SHUT THE FUCK UP! I'll be watching you... *(Pointing to our "model participant")* 1603437 WILL.... BE.... WATCHING YOU!

JOKER 1 winks at our "model participant" before storming off in anger, exiting USR under the hammock. UNCLE SAM's arm comes down with cash in hand, and JOKER 1 takes the cash pauses, turns towards guest-actors and says seductively...

We want you... *(exits)*

NARRATOR gasps for air, releasing breath. JOKER 2 consults their paperwork while skimming the guest-actors one last time. A look of panic crosses his/her face as s/he realizes MISS is no longer in the middle of the group. At this point, MISS has reached NARRATOR's cell, and is trying to find a way to release him/her. There is no door. NARRATOR begins to speak the following as JOKER 2 exits in a panic, ducking under

the hammock in fear. As NARRATOR speaks s/he begins with the same fast paced, monotone quality as heard before, only this time s/he progressively slows down the pace of speech, adding more and more color to tonality, s/he comes alive.

NARRATOR

“In any case
the whore,
oh the whore,
it's not from this side of the world,
it's not in this gesture of the world,
it's not in a gesture of this very world
that I say
that I want and can indicate what I think,
and they will see it,
they will feel it,
they will take notice of it through my clumsy drawings,

[MISS attempts to slip through the bars, she cannot fit, though she can touch him/her and does so lovingly. NARRATOR ignores this action out of fear and pride...]

but so wily,
and so adroit,
which say SHIT to this very world.

What are they?
What do they mean?

The innate totem of man.

(NARRATOR, catches MISS's arm in one swift movement, like a frog catching a fly. She is frightened.)

Gris-gris to come back to man.

All breaths in the hollow, sunken
pesti-fering
arcature
of my true teeth.

(NARRATOR loosens his/her grip on MISS, and pulls her in towards him/her)

Not one which is not a breath thrown with all the strength
of my lungs,

(MISS begins to breathe heavily, hyperventilating... not out of fear, but desperation. She is haunted by feelings of helplessness.)

with all the sieve
of my respiration,

not one which does not respond to a real physiological activity,
which is not,
not its figurative translation”

NARRATOR and MISS together
“but something like an efficacious sieve,
on the materialized paper.”

*Lights fade to **Blackout**. In complete darkness we hear...*

NARRATOR
Ribbit.

Scene 2: The “Actor” Prepares

Lights come up on stage. MISS is sitting center stage (CS) on a mound of pillows and blankets with a TV remote in her hand. She looks cozy, almost pampered, undoubtedly comfortable in the physical sense. She is obviously emotionally distraught, while she munches on large bowl of popcorn. The bowl is unrealistically large in size.

USR JOKERS 1-5 sit comfortably beneath the hammock USR. They no longer wear joker hats, they have become ACTORS (of course, in the Boalian sense) and each have their own small bowl of popcorn. They watch MISS, enjoying the show...

NARRATOR
Preparations. -:-PM

UNCLE SAM
Last night, Lake Bryan (*or other location relevant to where this performance is taking place*), a place where so many great American families come together to enjoy our wholesome Texas (*or other relevant location*) landscape, was transformed from an all-American, community gathering spot into a dangerous war zone. As the sun was setting, highlighting the clouds in glorious shades of pink and orange, gunfire was heard. (*ACTORS 1-5 applaud*) Families fled the scene as police arrived. Tossed in the bushes, a young man of only fifteen years was found. Dead. We cannot release his name at this time. No shooters have been identified, but witnesses describe the perpetrator as young, between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years old, approximately 5’9”, around 145

pounds, and obviously of Mexican or African American decent. No witness could identify his race specifically, though (unsurprisingly), he is said to have been brown...

ACTOR 1

BEANERS! (*Looks towards ACTOR 2*)

ACTOR 2

NIGGERS! (*Looks towards ACTOR 3*)

ACTOR 3

MONEY! (*Looks towards ACTOR 4*)

ACTOR 4

THREAT! (*Looks towards ACTOR 5*)

ACTOR 5

FREE-LOADERS! (*ACTORs 1-5 break out into laughter for an uncomfortably long period of time*)²³

NARRATOR

Ribbit.

UNCLE SAM

(*During this line ACTOR 3 beings to hum “Amazing Grace” quietly until MISS changes the channel.*) Fortunately, nobody was injured, though community members are reported to have been incredibly shaken up. Brazos County (*substitute relevant location*) Police encourage anyone who might have any information regarding this crime to contact authorities immediately. In the meantime, we offer Our Lord’s Prayer for the safety of this great community... Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy na—

(*MISS changes the channel*)

COME ON DOWN TO BIG BOB’S GUN WAREHOUSE!

ACTOR 1

Shot guns!

ACTOR 2

Rifles!

²³ While acting in a production of Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal*, director Amy Guerin inspired me to include expressionist imagery within this piece. That laughter, I would argue, is somewhat iconic of Guerin’s directed productions; however, the unrealistic movements as, seen with the ACTORs’ preceding lines was directly inspired by my experiences in *Machinal*.

ACTOR 3

Handguns!

ACTOR 4

Machine guns!

ACTOR 5

Fuck it...Grenades!

ALL

(With one swift motion, the 5 ACTORS all do the Nazi salute as they say in unison...)

Cleanse the nation! Cleanse the nation! U.S.A! U.S.A!

UNCLE SAM

Don't miss our biggest BLOWOUT sale yet! You want to show 'em what a REAL man looks like? There is a reason they say "DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS" *(This line can be omitted or changed in reference to performance location)*. This weekend... The ENTIRE weekend. Come on down to Big Bob's Gu—

(MISS changes the channel)

"Here we go! And now the Ferguson Meat Market and Liquor is being hit. They gave up on the McDonalds window. We're going to try and keep a safe distance, and still show you what's happening. The meat market and liquor store is being hit. This live now in Ferguson [...] on the ground [...]"²⁴

ACTOR 5

"Kind of makes me think about someone taking the lid off a jar of roaches & letting them loose."²⁵

UNCLE SAM

"Right now it's a baseball bat, but it looks like there is a juicier target here in the meat and liquor market, it looks like there is about fifty people out in front... Yeah, I saw another window break and there's people going in there now."

²⁴ Quoted from YouTube video "Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor store," taken from Fox News. All of UNCLE SAM's lines quote this video until MISS "changes the channel."

²⁵ Theraylan100, 2015, comment on Hicksgmail. *Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor Store*. YouTube, 6:26, 2014. <https://youtu.be/maL5K7VmbVQ>

ACTOR 4

“Anyone see any white people looting? No just blacks of course. Disgusting animals.”²⁶

UNCLE SAM

“Yep! There seems to be sort of a carnival atmosphere a lot of people [...] seem have big smiles and grins, nothing somber or serious about this group at all, in the wake of what’s happened. This is a group with a different agenda [...]”

ACTOR 3

“Black shopping at its best!”²⁷

UNCLE SAM

“This has very little to do with what happened in the shooting or Michael Brown, or even the decision...”

ACTOR 2

“ignorant blacks, they act mad but deep down are just using these events to steal liquor and other things that they wont work for.”²⁸

ACTOR 1

“i pray to god if i have any daughters that they'll never date a person darker than a Mexican.”²⁹

UNCLE SAM

“and, we know that there have been agitators that have been training now, for a long period of time, leading up to this and specific targets were—”

(MISS changes the channel; in a sensual, female voice quality we hear...)

Hot body babe. I need your bod. Give me that bod!

In this persona, UNCLE SAM begins moaning wildly. MISS is getting hot, fans herself a bit before being startled by the sound of her phone which sounds much like the “count” alarm. She quickly turns off the television, jumps up, throwing pillows around, searching for her cell phone. She finds it, looks at her caller ID, and then answers. She speaks in what sounds like a mechanized recorded voice, saying words she has heard many times.

²⁶ Jayson, 2015, comment on Hicksgmail. *Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor Store*. YouTube, 6:26, 2014. <https://youtu.be/maL5K7VmbVQ>

²⁷ freesf tfrefv, 2014, comment on Hicksgmail. *Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor Store*. YouTube, 6:26, 2014. <https://youtu.be/maL5K7VmbVQ>

²⁸ andrew valentine, 2014, comment on Hicksgmail. *Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor Store*. YouTube, 6:26, 2014. <https://youtu.be/maL5K7VmbVQ>

²⁹ Adventureless Hero, 2014, comment on Hicksgmail. *Riots in Ferguson- Looting Liquor Store*. YouTube, 6:26, 2014. <https://youtu.be/maL5K7VmbVQ>

MISS

Hello. This is a free call from.... To accept this call, please press one. *(She pushes a button on her phone.)* Your call may be recorded and is subject to monitoring. Thank you for using Century Link. You may start your conversation now... Hi! Oh—uh. Nothing. I was just—it's nothing *(laughs lightly)*. I'm alone. Yes, I can talk. Pretty good...you? Huh? What? I'm sorry, I can barely hear you, why is it so loud? Oh...*(holding the phone from her ear as if someone is yelling)*. Oh yea, that's better. I said I'm good...you? No, just watching TV. The news. Ferguson. Yeah... *(pause)* I can't come see you this weekend. No, no—I literally CAN'T. I don't really have the gas money to drive up there...uh huh...no, no, I can't accept money from your mom like that...No. Well, I'm like drowning in homework too. Yeah. *(Pause)* I'm not—Are you kidding me?! Please tell me why it is you think I need to serve time with you? No, no-no-no-no I'M talking. Sometimes I need a break, man. Like sometimes I just need to zone out to the TV. You come take my spot for a day, fuckin' five hundred pages of reading, weekly papers, and fieldwork, undergrads in my TA classes blowin' up my email...and oh! Oh—as if that's not enough, I gotta find time to bust my ass up to Huntsville *(or relevant prison location)* to visit you because you had a rough week. *(pause)* Jesus, no, that's not what I'm saying. It's just, what you are asking of me...leaves me no time for me. Don't you get that? Why does every minute of my life gotta be policed by shit to do, people to please, places to be...I'm not the one who broke the law. I'M NOT THE ONE WHO FUCKED UP. Why I gotta pay for your crime? *(pause, instantly regretting what she just said.)* I'm sorry. No I know, I know it's hard to shake old habits. I didn't mean that. I KNOW HOW YOU GREW UP, MAN! I know, and it's not fair. I'm sorry I said that. I didn't mean it, I'm just stressed...Next weekend, okay? I—I'm doing fieldwork tomorrow. Yeah. Yeah, my first day. No, I'm nervous. I don't know, I just am. Okay. Yeah I will, I'll do my best. Right. Yeah, I love you too. I'm sorry. Okay. *(Pause)* No, man, you know I don't like calling people for you. *(Pause, she groans.)* Okay, yeah I'll call her tomorrow. Okay. YES I got it. Okay. I love you. Bye. *(Again, she speaks as though she is mocking a mechanized recording.)* The caller has hung up. Goodbye.

MISS goes to turn the TV back on, in doing so she becomes aware she is being watched. She jumps, straightens herself out to feel more presentable, and begins speaking directly to the guest-actors, nervously.

Oh! Hi! Wow, how embarrassing, I didn't know you were watching this whole time. How silly of me. *(Pauses to think about what she just said)* You're always watching. Stupid. Not you! Me! Sorry. Let me start again. Hi! I'm MISS...Just Miss. Or—

UNCLE SAM

Participant 1606412. *(laughs)*

MISS

But you can call me Miss. *(pause)* You all are very quiet. I'm feeling a little naked up here. Rhetorically, not literally! I'm not getting naked...I am not going to...strip.

MISS laughs...Pauses. She looks at someone on the left hand side of the guest-actor group and speaks directly to him/her.

Hi! You, there, in the *(article of clothing)*. Yeah, hi! My name is Miss. What is your name? *(Speaking directly over him/her with no regard to his answer)* You look like a nice person. I'm really excited you've decided to show up here today. All of you. It gets a little lonely, you know, doing these rituals all alone. I mean, what good is a ritual if you're the only one doing it? Like, does it really make any difference? Is there any real, substantial "rite of passage?" Don't answer that. I like to think it does change something, for me. But today! WOW! Today I have all of you here with me. Consider this a kind of like a séance if you will. Please, don't be alarmed if it seems I've become possessed. In fact, consider it an honor.

Speaking as though she is referencing mystical beings, she moves her body as if conjuring great power. She is in many ways parodying herself.

It's not everyday someone like me establishes contact with the other world. The other side... SENTIENT BEINGS...THE GREAT...THE POWERFUL...*(Clears throat with anti-climactic ending)* The academy.

Please don't laugh, I find it offensive. But wait here, let me grab my materials. Please...wait...don't leave.

MISS runs off stage. ACTORS 1-5 stare intensely at the guest-actors. There is no sound, no movement. Two or three minutes pass.

NARRATOR

Rabbit.

MISS returns with candles and three books in her hand: Critical Ethnography, Cultural Struggles, and The Ritual Process.

MISS

HERE! Here, I'm back. I didn't leave, I just had to grab these! *(Pausing CS and looking across the audience)* You all are so sweet. You stayed. Every last one of you. Gosh. Thank you!

Meticulously placing the books and candles in front of the guest-actors, preparing for the séance.

I am so excited to be doing this with all of you today. I usually struggle, a lot, you know, trying to get a FULL BODY experience, trying to really conjure the greats! I think with your help, today could be transformative. And it's the perfect timing too. Tomorrow...well, tomorrow is the big day. MY big day. Not yours... sorry. Today is maybe your big day...tomorrow is mine, and so here—with your help—I am preparing for my rite of passage.

MISS begins lighting the candles on stage in a highly theatrical way, humming "Amazing Grace," then quietly singing the lyrics. As she finishes, she steps back briefly, scrutinizing her preparations, making sure everything is in order.

OKAY! (*Her voice shifts into a trance-like quality*) Please, close your eyes. Become one with your surroundings. Take a few deep, deep breaths, in, and out. In, and out. Good. You may open...your eyes—not your mouths though. Be sure to keep quiet.

Beginning in her normal voice, she sounds awkward, as though this is her first time facilitating a séance, eventually relaxing into the process with confidence.

Hear ye, hear ye, blessed deities of theory (*she chuckles at her rhyme*). I, Miss (*pause, and coughs her number*) Participant 1606412, hereby surrender myself to you. I call upon... ye... your greatness, your strength, your wisdom. I beg ye, activate a full body awakening within me.

MISS begins to lose control of her body, as though she is fighting a possession. She falls to the floor, her body jerking about the stage, landing her directly in front of Victor Turner's The Ritual Process. MISS picks up the book, which flips directly to a page from which she reads, as though the book is controlling her. She recites the following in a trance-like state.

"Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. They may go disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands...." (*Turner 1977*).

Attempting to break trance she struggles to remove the book from her hand, in her own voice she says desperately...

I don't think I am ready for this... (*Returning to trance*) "Their behavior is normally passive or humble; they must obey their instructors implicitly, and accept arbitrary punishment without complaint. It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (*Turner 1977*).

Giving into the trance, she begins to converse with Victor Turner, whose voice can now only be heard in her head

Mr. Turner, is that you? Doctor! I'm so sorry, Doctor Turner... what if I don't want to be initiated into a new group? I mean, what if I am scared? I work with prison inmates! *(The book flies angrily out of her hand.)* I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Yes! Yes! I do consider the inmates I work with as...equals, and yes they do consider me to be an authority figure. Because I'm free! I am older. It is my role to guide them through a creative process many have not experienced before... WE MAKE THEATRE! Yes... "Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" *(Turner 1977)*. He who is high, must experience what it is like to be low... He who is high must experience what it is like to be low. He who is hi—

MISS's body loses control. She flails about the stage, calling out "Help" and "Wait" a few times, landing directly in front of Cultural Struggles. Again, she picks up the book... It flips to a page...

Dr. Conquergood! Are you here with me? Dwight? D-Dizzle? My man...main squeeze, supper D—*(frightened)* Sorry! Dr. Conquergood...WOW! Oh man, what an honor...Dr. Conquergood, it is such an honor to be possessed by your spirit. Let me tell you: I am such a fan. No really, like, totally into your work. You've really played a huge role in my scholarship. I've also been lucky enough to work with some of your students from Northwestern. I got a little bit of the inside scoop, it even sounds like we may share some similar bad writing habits...Procrastination is a— Nope, nope you're right, not what I conjured you for.

Humming for a moment in meditation of the book, she then begins to recite the following in a trance-like voice...

"The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation, and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: 'knowing that,' and 'knowing about.' This is a view from above the object of inquiry: knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how,' and 'knowing who.' This is a view from ground level in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within performance and community, but is ephemeral" *(Conquergood 2013)*.

MISS throws the book, this time on her own, and momentarily breaking trance she says in frustration...

IT IS NOT EPHEMERAL! (*Taken again by trance*) Yes, I am still here. Right. I have to be there. “Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted,” (*Conquergood 2013*). No, you’re right, I completely agree with you. But is it my duty to bridge that gap? Is it my body that must serve in placing the two—text and performance—in conversation with one another? Why should I be responsible for illuminating these issues? I don’t like being vulnerable, Dr. Conquergood. I don’t like witnessing my privilege, nor letting go of it completely. I’m scared...(*Pause*) It’s just that... reading is so much easier, you know? Observing from a distance.

MISS begins rambling. Eventually we can tell she is now speaking to herself more than anything, trying to validate her fears.

I have a really hard time not becoming emotionally attached to people, especially if I am doing theatre with them. It’s funny...I actually hate reading...Hate is a strong word, it’s really a love-hate relationship. Reading gives me headaches. I tried to go to disability services for help with my dyslexia. They told me I have ADHD...It’s always something. Just because I don’t learn the right way, or I have trouble in certain ways I am “disabled.” I’m not just different, unique, special...it can’t be an opportunity, my learning style is a hindrance...stuff like that...It’s an obstacle. Whatever! I think it’s a challenge! Who wants to float through life anyway? Wouldn’t it get boring? At the same time, if my research were just archival I would feel much safer. No anxiety, just collecting data with a critical distance...But then I really do get bored, and...I don’t know. My life is a never ending paradox...(*Long pause*)

NARRATOR

Ribbit...

MISS

Dr. Conquergood? Dr. Conquergood? Hello? HELLO?! Shoot! (*Addressing guest-actors*) I lost him...let me try to get back into a trance...

MISS moves to sit in front of Critical Ethnography, takes a few deep breaths, closes her eyes but is interrupted by her phone ringing again...MISS rushes to her phone, she looks at the caller ID, chuckles, feeling silly she says to the guest-actors ...

It’s Madison... (*Answering the phone*) Hello? Hi yes, Dr. Soyini Madison. I know, I know...how silly of me. How is good ole Illinois? (*She pronounces the “s”*). Thank you so much for calling. I can’t tell you how exciting this is for me. I read your book, *Acts of Activism*, it changed everything for me. I didn’t realize scholarship could look like that. Yeah, you know, I come from a theatre background, I’m so used to hearing that stereotype “actors are stupid,” right? I didn’t think I could use performance to teach anything substantial. Yes, oh yeah, I spoke with Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood

before you. They sounded pretty good, you know, they left behind some pretty influential scholarship. Oh—right! Yeah, they gave me some pretty great advice but I need a little more direction, it was a little heavy. I think I’m up to the challenge. I guess, I don’t know...I get it, I need to immerse myself in the field I am studying. I get it, there are certain things that cannot be learned textually or from a bird’s eye view. But how then do I talk about these experiences in my scholarship? How do I write about the “subordinate,” through my “ground level view,” without being biased? Without dehumanizing them into data? I mean, even if I do go through a liminal phase, and participate in embodied learning; even after I reach *communitas*, how the heck do I put that in a thesis without returning to this pre-liminal state? (*Chuckles*) I thought you would say that self-reflexivity... Yes, I suppose I should let them all speak for themselves.

Throughout the following, MISS is heard on the phone with a variety of “uh huh’s,” She has found a notepad and is writing rigorously. During this time ACTORS 1-5 approach MISS and begin collecting all of her materials. They slowly strip away any comfort she had in the beginning of this scene. MISS is too involved in her call to notice or care.

NARRATOR

“Performative writing as something embodied means the evocations of ‘Other-wise’ worlds are not disembodied creations” (*Pollock, 1998*). “Writing has been considered a marriage between the imagination and the intellect. In performative writing we recognize that the *body* writes. Critical ethnography adheres to radical empiricism: the intersection of bodies in motion and space. Meaning and experiences in the field are filtered and colored through sensations of the body—that is, through body knowledge. If we accept that knowledge has infinite origins and forms, we are able to accept knowledge from and of the body” (*Madison 2012*).

MISS

Yeah I guess that’s why I’m doing this performance. Oh yeah, I’m in the middle of a performance right now. I don’t think they’re bored. (*Pause*) Well, they might be now. Yeah, I guess I better let you go, we’re headed towards liminality. (*laughs*) Right! Yeah, I’ll let you know how it goes. Yeah. Hey thanks again! Thank you. Bye.

At this point ACTORS 1-5 have exited the stage. All that is left is MISS, sitting on the floor with her notebook and pad of paper. She looks around, startled by the emptiness, then looks at the guest-actors, shrugs her shoulders, takes a long deep breath, and on the exhale...

Blackout

Scene 3: The Liminal “Spectator”

A spot light fades in on MISS standing CS. She lifts her hand above her eyes as if she is looking directly into the sun.

NARRATOR

Neither here, nor there. -:--pm...

MISS wipes sweat from her forehead, and swats at a fly. Then takes a moment to breathe before she begins speaking.

MISS

(To herself) You can do this. You can do this. *(To the guest-actors)* It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, it was warm out, but not too warm out. At least not too warm as far as Texas summers are concerned.

The spot begins to slowly fade out as she speaks, while a pleasant flood light fades in to illuminate the rest of the stage. VOICE is heard...MISS searches for this voice, it is comforting, but also confusing. She cannot find it.

VOICE

As a woman and
 the whole – uh
mothering *role*
and all that kind of thing in our society,
I realized you know,
well, yes
I probably
would have liked to have *had* another child
 I-
My life just
I just haven't had another child
 but knowing that and
looking at the things I do do
had I *had* another child
I would have been so invested in that *child*
that I wouldn't be able to do all this other stuff I do for all these other kids
and *that's important* to me

As she is speaking the following, FROG A enters, hopping to upstage right (USR). The FROGS need not be in full costume. They should perform “frog” through movement, and will remove their black sweaters exposing green shirts. MISS is pleased by his presence. She turns to walk back towards FROG A but he hops back in fear due to her eager approach.

MISS

Oh! I'm sorry. I didn't mean—

She returns to CS and continues speaking to the guest-actors.

I called her before the big day. I asked if we could meet, said I was feeling nervous. Uneasy. I didn't feel as though I had the credentials to participate in the ways she was asking me to—though I'd taken on this type of role in the past. Something felt different, yet, I hadn't even arrived. I don't—I don't know what it is was. I mean, I feel nervous a lot. I am perpetually anxious, as a person anyway, but in general somewhat confident regardless. But, these frogs, or I guess tadpoles if you will, well, they weren't only being held in captivity, many of them didn't have an army to swim home to...

VOICE is heard again, this time simultaneously with NARRATOR, slowly fading out into silence. MISS spends another second looking for the source, sees NARRATOR speaking, rushes towards him/her, but NARRATOR has already stopped speaking by the time she reaches the cell. MISS is confused, but becomes distracted by FROG B's entrance. FROG B hops on stage directly to FROG A without noticing MISS. They begin to play, chasing each other and hopping over each other. MISS sits on the floor as if enjoying a summer afternoon outside, responding to the FROGS interactions like she is watching a ballgame.

VOICE and NARRATOR together

I met a young man
um – in 2005 from New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, and
I don't know what it was about it him he was twelve years old at
the time,
he was a *tough* kid
I mean he was a monster (*laughing lightly*)

VOICE

but I *loved* him he was he was amazing
he had this light in his eyes
and he was *funny*
but he was also—
there was a lot of bravado,
he was really *scared* you know he just *lost everything*
he was there with his great grandmother
and who *knew* what was next
and he did have some learning challenges and stuff like that but
he was just, he was an amazing entrepreneur
I mean he really was
and the center that he was living in with his great grandma at the

time
provided a lot of candy and that's how I met him cause we were
helping
people
you know recover from the hurricane Katrina
he would
shove
candy in his pockets before he would head out to school
yes
shove em' full (laughing lightly)
and I was like *what are you doing*
he's like *ma'am I'm sellin' it*
he's 12 years old and he's taking the candy to school and he's
selling it
making money
cause how else does a 12-year-old make money in that condition
you know you're in a completely strange place
but *that's how quick his mind was*
you could just see this *beauty* in him and
I mean I just loved him *so so* much
it was one of those
short, brief, intense relationship kind of things
and *my own* child was actually just a year younger than him
so there was that connection that was happening

As VOICE fades out FROG A and FROG B have landed DSL and DSR, FROG B notices MISS for the first time.

FROG 4

Hello, Miss.

As if star struck, MISS moves towards FROG B.

MISS

Hi!

Something holds her back this time, a barrier she cannot cross. She returns to CS and addresses the guest-actors again. During this speech FROG C hops out. FROG A and FROG B hop over to FROG C to investigate that he is okay as ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 enter behind him. ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 carry a large, blank, plastic canvas on wheels, and a bag full of paints and tools. The FROGs hop around the stage, never getting closer than a few feet to MISS. The sound of rain begins to slowly fade in. It fades in slow enough that one might even question at the beginning whether or not they are hearing these sounds. Excitement is rising.

She picked me up at my apartment, said we could talk about my reservations on the ride there, her energy was contagious. Just sitting next to her in the car made me feel like everything was going to be okay. She told me the frogs would put me in my place. There was no room for ego at this zoo, I was to follow their lead, but require respect.

At this time ACTORs 1 and 2 have finished situating the canvas and laying out the paint supplies in meticulous order. Supplies include: paint, spatulas, brushes, and a whisk; and the FROGS have begun painting the canvas—mostly with their hands—first in apprehension, then with eager confidence and unbound joy, every now and then laughing and shouting at MISS for attention. ACTOR 1 and 2 have brought the chain barrier used during the audience entrances on stage. Every time the FROGs shout for her she is blocked from reaching them, but she continues telling her story, joyously.

I guess I figured, why not let them show me what they needed from me?

FROG B

Miss, look! Look at my hands!

VOICE

It's about *them* finding their *own* tools, not me giving them tools.

MISS

We drove through some back roads I had never been on before, passing lush green pastures with beautiful large bulls surrounding manmade watering holes. I was taken aback by their horns. I stared at them intensely as we turned the corner, I tried to make eye contact with one as if begging for a sign they were conscious. They were magnificent. It has always amazed me that such ferocious looking beasts, with God-given weapons for protection could find themselves being...farmed.

FROG C

Miss! Miss! Look! Come paint!

MISS

Anyway, when I arrived it was around 9:30AM, we set up the room for discussion. The tables were somewhat of a formality but it felt...well—they felt like a boundary. Our little frogs trickled in, some eagerly introducing themselves and wildly curious about who I was; others not so pleased or readily trusting. We spent the first half of our morning talking about art, all different kinds of art. Painting!

FROG B

Poetry!

Music!	MISS
Dance!	FROG C
Culinary Arts!	FROG B
Sculpting!	MISS
Comic books!	FROG C
Photography!	FROG B
Chalk art!	FROG A

Theatre. Performance.	MISS
-----------------------	------

She gestures the space, saving the audience from any comfort this scene may have lent thus far.

I had already fallen in love with them. We also set rules. Together. The Don'ts: Don't put down each other's work.

No hitting.	FROG C
No cursing.	FROG B
No fighting.	FROG C
No name calling.	FROG A

Some Do's, like DO help each other.	MISS
-------------------------------------	------

At this point ACTORs 1 and 2 begin wrapping MISS up with the chain, slowly containing her, limiting her movements more and more. The chain begins to manipulate and contort her body; she slowly becomes grotesque, disabled, and strange; yet she refuses to stop smiling. Her body slowly becomes objectified, her speech somewhat strained; she is continually moving, shifting, though not resisting.

FROG C

Encourage each other.

FROG B

Be open-minded.

MISS

Help... Help each other.

FROG A

Share.

MISS

DO have fun. Be a kid! Have fun. And they did. We did. *(pause)* They did. As we closed out our conversation, I stood up to excuse myself to the restroom at which point I was pulled aside.

ACTOR 1 is still holding one end of the chain, pulls taut, jerking MISS's body. MISS whimpers softly, but continues moving undefeated. ACTOR 2 says to her softly, sounding as though she/he is almost in tears...

ACTOR 2

I'm sorry, you cannot speak to the frogs for the remainder of the day.

ACTOR 1

(Much more firmly and with another jerk from her/his end of the rope) No, no contact whatsoever.

MISS

What?

The sound of rain continues fading in. The FROGs are now repeating over and over, louder and louder, faster and faster (adlibbing a bit) "Miss, look" "Look at my hands" "look, look Miss" "Mis,s look at these colors" etc., while running to and from canvas to MISS, getting closer and closer to her each time. The more and more contained she becomes, the closer they approach her...She refuses to stop smiling, but begins shrinking into herself.

Upon MISS looking defeated, the FROGs are somehow able to touch her. They come to her, and though her body is in constant motion, they begin inspecting her shape. Their hands, covered in paint, leave prints all over her black clothing. Suddenly UNCLE SAM's arm flops out of the hammock and the "count" alarm is heard above everything. The audience is, again, assaulted by this noise.

ACTOR 1

COUNT!

ACTOR 2

COUNT!

The FROGs quickly clean up their mess, the rain continues to increase in volume. FROGs B and C exit with the supplies, leaving the freshly painted canvass. MISS is on the floor panting and shaking in fear. The alarm has stopped and the sound of rain fades out while the lights dim almost to blackout, simultaneously. For about ten seconds, all that can be heard is the sound of MISS breathing heavily, whimpering lightly.

Lights fade to black as a spot comes up on MISS again. FROG A hops close to her, entering the spotlight, and places his hands around her face as she looks at him. FROG A leaves two little green handprints on her cheeks. The sound of rain fades back in, but only to a light comforting rattle. FROG A begins to unwrap the chains from around her body. And this begins ACTORS 1 and 2 drop the chains and turn their backs away from this action. It continues while they speak...

FROG A

Did you know that frogs are born in water? And that there are like 5,000 different species of frogs? Maybe like five hundred thousand different kinds! Would that be so cool? We live all over the world. Everywhere, except, of course, Antarctica. But, I mean, who really lives in Antarctica. I like the heat. Frogs are carnivores too. We eat meat, just like you. We're just like you!

MISS

(With both an expression of awe, and a smirk of amusement) Humans are omnivores. We eat meat and vegetables.

The spotlight remains, but a small flood of blue light slowly fades in to illuminate the rest of the stage.

FROG A

Oh—yeah. And did you know that frogs don't even need to drink water? We absorb it through our skin. Kind of like magic. I don't know hardly anybody else who can do that...I think it's pretty special.

MISS

Yes! Very special. Unique...

FROG A

Some frogs can jump like twenty times their own body length.

He stops unchaining her for a moment and jumps a few times, showing off his skills, but disappointing himself. MISS is enthralled by him. She stares in loving fascination, speaking to him as he is jumping and responding to his disappointment.

MISS

You'll get there, you're still very young.

FROG A, realizing she is still partially chained up rushes back to her to continue his deed, nearly speaking over her as though he had not heard her comment.

FROG A

But I can't do it. Not yet, they don't give me enough space here anyway. I would hit a fence or something. I get in trouble when I try to jump too far. Did you know that lots of frog species care for their babies? Like they protect them and feed them and make sure they are okay. Like, love kind of, I think. Like frog families are real. They are real. *(Pause)*. But then some frogs just leave their young to fend for themselves. But I think that's okay too. It makes them stronger, maybe. I don't know. Some frogs just end up being used for experiments...*(Having released MISS completely)* There!

MISS stretches her body out, enjoying her freedom for the moment. FROG A imitates her while she is not looking.

MISS

Ah! Thank you. So, where did you learn all of that?

FROG A

(Looking at her as though the answer was obvious) I read it. Duh.

MISS and FROG A stare at each other for a moment. She now mirrors his form, becoming frog-like. They share an eternal moment. One that will live in her body forever. He tests her accuracy, moving and jumping to see if she will do the same. While they are doing this VOICE and NARRATOR are heard in the same way as before.

NARRATOR and VOICE together

It was the same with this *boy* from New Orleans
he was *sent*

back um
with parents that
he probably shouldn't have been with,
but there was nothing we could do about it

VOICE

legally,
nothing,
and *he said* “I don't want X”
but because it was a major *crisis* and they were from another *state* and
people didn't want to take *responsibility* and all this kind of thing
and the parents hadn't done anything *wrong* in this *state* and there
was no documentation of them doing anything wrong *that we knew of* in
the other *state*
and the kids like “no no no”
and the great-grandmother's like “*no no no*”
you know, *after* we found the mother
and so
he goes *back*
with the mom
and then he ends up living in a hotel room for like *three weeks*
without school without anything,
well, I don't know what the parents were doing
and
I was able to see him one more time before he ended up back in
New Orleans
and at the age of 15 he was dead
he was dead

MISS becomes conscious of ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 who are still onstage. The spotlight fades out leaving only the blue...The ACTORs boundaries were never broken, nor transgressed. Their boundaries take many forms, and are often parasitic. That is they feed off of, and live within others when necessary. At this moment the ACTORs' boundaries manifest as MISS. She becomes frightened.

MISS

(To FROG A) I—uh...I'm not technically allowed to talk to you.

With this utterance the lights violently change from a blue wash into red, flickering on and off with strobe light intensity. ACTORs 1 and 2 take the chain and violently wrap it around FROG A, dragging him off stage in a struggle. This struggle does not suggest a hasty exit. It is slow and intentional. FROG A is now taking on similar body contortions

as MISS experienced while in constraints. His body loses figure, becomes grotesque, disfigured, and objectified.

Once FROG A, ACTOR 1 and ACTOR 2 have exited completely, the red lights fade out into a soft, somewhat dim wash of white light on the stage. Nothing is left on the stage but MISS and the painted canvas. She walks up to the painting, looks for a short moment, holds back tears, forces a brief smile and begins a poem. She recites the poem to nobody in particular while inspecting the painting, scrutinizing every detail.

The Mourning Dove does not mourn for the pigeon
They are one in the same in the Mourning Dove's vision

When the sky is blue, so too are her wings
And she flies in search of the finer things

She soars alongside butterflies and eagles
Tying color and courage to the freedom of seagulls

Yet naively she'll perch on a steel colored cloud
It shuffles and pushes her down to the ground

Though the walking pigeon cannot be seen
The Mourning Dove feels him through each of her wings

Azure feathers transform into uniform gray
And she coos like a babe under daunting steel shade

Desperately grasping her pinion in vain
Mourning Dove mourns the pigeons walking crusade³⁰

She stops, turns to the guest-actors, void of emotion and with a child-like voice she says...

It looks like a TreeHouse.

Blackout

³⁰ "Mourning Dove" was written after my first day in the field training to return as a volunteer with CPAP as part of my field notes.

IV. HEART CHAKRA: ACT II

“Here one must ‘take heart’ and ‘have heart,’ learning to tolerate heartache and overcome heartlessness.”

Scene 1: Pre-Liminal Conundrums

Our space is no longer a blank canvas. It is now painted with bodies. Bodies that have produced, exchanged, and perhaps resisted painfully uncomfortable levels of affect. We have made this space our own, a direct reflection of reality, stripped from daily illusions of a post-racial, just society.

In a live staging of this play an intermission is not necessary; however, if the director choses to include an intermission, it should take place within the “theater,” and doors should remain closed. MISS should remain onstage, frozen (like a statue) in whatever position she was in as lights went to blackout. She cannot move forward without the guest-actors; her community. At the beginning of intermission, JOKERS 1-5 enter the stage. One should announce intermission, invite guest-actors to move throughout the space, and remain within the theatre for the duration of intermission. Guest-actors should be encouraged to enter the “stage,” inspect the painted canvass, NARRATOR’s cell, etc... NARRATOR, and UNCLE SAM remain in their positions as well. UNCLE SAM’s arm should hang out of the hammock with the “count” alarm in hand to remind guest-actors the performance is not over. NARRATOR can move and may speak to audience members who address him/her, but only speaking words from narratives collected from inmates incarcerated locally (wherever this may be staged). Another JOKER should be situated at the exit. Guest-actors who wish to leave the space should be asked to keep their right foot on one of three yellow lines. These line can be created by tape, one leading to the women’s restroom, one to the men’s, and the last outside. There should be a JOKER positioned outside each of these destinations. At the end of intermission, the count alarm will sound; again, at a painfully loud volume. Once heard all JOKERS should announce “COUNT,” and escort guest-actors back to their seats. There is no need for guest-actors to navigate boundaries to find their seats. Should they choose to change their seating arrangements, they have earned their rite to do so (though they should not be prompted). Once everyone is situated we hear another door slam which should happen simultaneously with a blackout. During the blackout JOKERS 1 and 2 should remove the canvass from the stage, remove their hats, and return.

Lights come up on the stage, ACTORS 1 and 2 are standing under UNCLE SAM’s hammock. MISS is now sitting in a semi-circle with FROGS A-C, who are all wearing joker hats. They are all holding hands, in harmony, as if in communitas. Their eyes are closed as though they are all in deep meditation. With her eyes closed, MISS and NARRATOR say...

NARRATOR and MISS together

Initiation... -:-pm

UNCLE SAM

(Pointing finger towards audience) I WANT YOU!

ACTORs 1 and 2 start rambling off numbers, overlapping each other, in a similar absurdist, fast paced, monotone voice as we heard from NARRATOR in the ACT I. Each time they say a number they do so pointing at a guest-actor. UNCLE SAM speaks over them.

ACTOR 1

1573821
1387489
1653956
1784374
1808757
1983746
1098372
1728302
1839293
1334782
1837229
1738291

ACTOR 2

1674832
1829291
1093818
1682683
1093058
1639204
1849392
1937492
1948302
1893048
1749027
1838462

UNCLE SAM

Land of the free!
You are the American
Dream!
Respect the powers that
be!
Home of the brave!
We will honor your
grave!
We're the U.S. of A!
Red!
White!
Blue!
These stars shine for
you!
Blue, White, and Red!
Let your egos be fed...

Halfway through these lines MISS and FROGs A-C begin to "aum" in meditation, starting softly, but increasing in volume. Immediately after the UNCLE SAM says the word "fed," MISS interjects, louder than all three of them together. Opening her eyes, she says...

MISS

STOP!

MISS wipes tears from her eyes.

ACTOR 2

Something is happening...

ACTOR 1

Sam?

UNCLE SAM

(Limply pointing towards the audience) I need you...

ACTOR 1

SAM?! Something is happening. I'm afraid there is a glitch in the panopticon.

UNCLE SAM's arm flops down and nearly hits ACTOR 1. ACTOR 1 pulls out the money he had received at the beginning of the performance and places it in UNCLE SAM's hand. MISS watches this action, and slowly returns to her seated position with the FROGS. While this is happening, NARRATOR recites the following poem, with passion. This is the first time we see him/her with full, individual character. Through the entire poem, the actions on stage should be carefully choreographed like a dance, the pace of movement and blocking should increase in speed...

NARRATOR

Curious eyes disguise affective flows
Coaxing hungry hearts ambitiously exposed
You suppose, opacity sparks human highs?
Puff, puff, pass, now pass it back, just relax
You don't inhale, you just sit back and laugh

Suddenly, MISS and the FROGS break out into wild laughter, falling all over each other. They begin contorting their bodies freely, through their laughter (in a Butoh-like fashion). The laughter slowly fades as NARRATOR continues reciting the poem. MISS and the FROGS movements continue in a slow and purposeful manner throughout the poem. Their bodies move closer and closer towards NARRATOR's cell.

Energetically confined
Crawling off paintbrush, to canvass, to stranger friend's mind
Like smooth sailing, fuck inhaling
You start flying
Jumping boundaries without even trying
Pick pocket emotional ties
But keep it, if what's yours could be mine
And crying suddenly seems... irresponsible
We are tasked with feeding our own visceral desires
I can touch myself so long as my psyche is on fire
And what's your ethos intelligent frog?
What's your view of this dangerous world?
I'm hurled
Through performance aesthetics

Music begins to fade in to a comfortable volume. It is abstract, lacking a recognizable composition pattern or consistent rhythm.

Feeling slightly pathetic
I read it, the story of your life
But it can't really be compared to mine
So why, at that moment, did I still feel like crying?
While simultaneously, in my head, you are not defined by your crime
But still, shit's pretty wild
I'm behaving like a child
Hungry and wide-eyed
Wish I would climb through this stranger frog's mind
I'll be fine

At this moment, MISS momentarily becomes still. She slowly stands while the others continue moving. She has been humbled, but cannot escape her privilege completely. Here, she is coming to terms with her role as the "Joker." The poem continues...

You don't have to explain
I'm tame
Negotiating fine lines

NARRATOR and MISS together

Life is ephemeral

NARRATOR

Friendship always memorable
But you... you're impenetrable

ACTOR 1

No....

NARRATOR

No penetration, no length explanations

MISS takes a few steps forward downstage as she says the following line with anger...

NARRATOR and MISS together

Fuck domestication!

MISS pulls her hair back into a pony tail, pulls her sleeves up, and begins stretching and punching the air as though she is practicing for a boxing match. At this point the FROGS

have reached NARRATOR's cell. It sits on wheels and through their contortions they push NARRATOR to CS. NARRATOR continues...

NARRATOR

You are wild
Institutionalization, AKA incarceration
Can't... imprison... your thoughts

ACTOR 1

STOP!

ACTOR 1 gestures to ACTOR 2 to take action. They move towards the FROGs, but, like MISS in the previous scene, keep hitting invisible barriers while getting closer and closer each time... MISS and the FROGs are unfazed by their efforts.

UNCLE SAM

I NEED YOU!

NARRATOR

You got kindly exclamations
HA HA, friend, you must be smiling
Send one my way while curiosity keeps piling
High

MISS gestures towards guest-actors as though she is challenging them in her boxing match, exclaiming the following verse in unison with NARRATOR and moving even farther downstage (DS).

NARRATOR and MISS together

STACK IT UP!

Having reached CS, NARRATOR offers the same chain used to confine MISS and FROG A in ACT I to the FROGs, keeping hold of one end. At this point ACTORS 1 & 2 frantically move back and forth from UNCLE SAM towards the FROGs in a robotic fashion. They look as though they may overheat but can now circle the cell. FROG A takes the other end of the chain in his hand.

NARRATOR

These questions I'll climb
Into the sky

Intelligent frog taking me on a ride.³¹

FROG A pulls the rope taut, ACTORs 1 and 2 trip and slowly fall to the ground as if drowning with their arms reaching into the air, grasping desperately at nothing. As soon as they trip the music cuts out, the fast paced chaos instantly stops, and a flood of blue light comes over the stage. Once again, we find MISS in a single spot light which follows her throughout the following section. Everyone, with the exception of MISS who is punching at air, moves in slow motion. MISS begins to recite her own poem. With the poem she is reflecting on her own transformations. She must first understand her experiences before she can fully become a “joker.”

MISS

I was born a tiger

The sound of light rain fades in...
I thirst for your blood
Fresh meat of unsuspecting gazelle
Hunger pains trump complex desires for love
I'm above African plains
Momentarily ignoring shame
What's your name?
Delectable
Respectable
Perfectable between my teeth
I eat as if I've been starving for days
And I'm amazed
As I sink into your flesh
How fresh your thighs really taste

MISS finally looks behind her. ACTORs 1 and 2 are on the floor, motionless; dead in front of NARRATOR's cell. MISS turns back towards the guest-actors; she knows they are not dead...

I was born a tiger
No queen of the jungle
I am humbled by the hunt
Let me show you my...

³¹ This poem was written just before I began fieldwork with the TreeHouse Project, about a close friend of mine who is currently incarcerated. I serendipitously met this friend during some of my greatest moments of self-doubt. Once I finally entered the field, he offered invaluable perspectives around incarceration when I was grappling over the difficult moments I experienced at the RTC.

One of the FROGs tosses the chain USR under UNCLE SAM. This sound startles MISS, she gasps, looks back again, then continues. The FROGs close in on ACTOR 1 and 2's bodies and begin nudging them through their own body contortions.

I'll entice you in
Seductively grin
You want to be torn apart
Let me feast upon your heart
Mine has grown numb
As I move through the Sahara
I can't bear the loneliness of this desert
Yet, I am not meant to be here but to be queer is not really my choice to have made
No one said I have to remain gloriously framed by our tumbling jungles
I'm maimed

Again, MISS looks behind her... The FROGs begin slowly taking ACTORS 1 and 2's black sweaters as they nudge and move about them, contorting their bodies on top of them. MISS begins to speak faster. She is nervous about what might happen next...

I was born a tiger
I can fend for myself
I don't need your help
I thrive on the element of surprise
Looking straight into your eyes
I see you but you can't really see me
I'm greedy
And yes, a little needy
That's why I swallow you whole
No self-control
I am dominated by my viscera
And it is this era that has ruined everything

MISS begins to pace downstage as if waiting for a birth. Her speech gets more and more frantic...

Mass production of meats
We eat without honoring our prey
So came the day where tiger is endangered
Tiger dependent on strangers
San Diego zoo safari park rangers
Instant gratification offers money exchangers the chance to experience an artificially constructed version of me

MISS pauses one last time looking back at the FROGs... The FROGs have yet to remove ACTORs 1 and 2's sweaters, but are making progress. At this moment ACTORs 1 and 2 suddenly hiccup once loudly.

ACTORs 1 and 2 together

Hiccup

This sound brings a paradoxical sigh of relief and fear across her body. She stops downstage right (DSR), and finishes the poem with her body angled towards the guest-actors, but open towards the action CS. She speaks this last part slowly...

I was born a tiger
I now walk as a kitten
I am smitten by the assurance of a meal
By capitalist consumer deals
My domestication is a reality vacation
But I miss being hungry
The opposite of hunger pain is satisfaction
Obtainable by knee jerk reactions
Not robotic retractions from the wild
If we are nearing the end
I don't plan to attend the apocalypse as a zombie

She takes a deep breath and says...

I will die as a tiger³²

ACTORs 1 and 2 together

Hiccup...

The "hiccup" cues the sound of rain, MISS' spot, and the blue lights fade out. A wash of gentle white light fades in onstage and everyone begins moving in real times once again.

MISS

Okay, so... My very first day in the field, I returned home, raced to my bedroom, and collapsed into tears. I failed... I failed them...

ACTORs 1 and 2 together

Riccup

³² This poem "Tiger," was written while I was conducting fieldwork with Voices Inside. Voices Inside is the only program in which I worked with adult inmates. I spent three weeks in Kentucky, visiting the prison three times a week with the program. Working with adult inmates illuminated some of the difficult emotions I encountered at the RTC.

The FROGs have finally removed ACTOR 1 and 2's sweaters, they too have green undershirts.

NARRATOR

“From a closed room to the open air, from the open air to prison—that will inevitably be my path. My naked body will be carried without any pretext of inconvenience. It will be allowed to pass without any inspection of my personal effects, and I will get another look at dance that can be narrated by bare hands and by walking.”³³

MISS begins undressing, slowly, throughout the remainder of this scene. She should move slowly enough that she is never fully naked before the blackout, but intensely enough to provoke discomfort and anticipation, and void of any sensuality. This should not be a sexual experience, rather she should feel willingly humiliated. MISS craves her own alienation.

Simultaneously, the FROGs continue bringing ACTORs 1 and 2 back to life. They no longer move in Butoh-like contortions. They hop as FROGs around the ACTORs who now take on their Butoh-like contortions as the FROGs interacting with them in amusement.

MISS

At least, it felt as though I had failed them. (*Quoting herself in anger*) “I’m not technically allowed to talk to you?!” I felt like such a coward.

NARRATOR

“I see in prison such a stage of tragedy, a stage of drama where the naked body and death are inseparably joined.”

MISS

Why wasn’t somebody out there with us? When did it become MY job manage both the institutional boundaries alongside my own emotional boundaries? What was I supposed to do? (*looking back at ACTORs 1 and 2*) And... how do they do it?

During NARRATOR’s following speech, MISS slowly becomes more and more frustrated with her clothes. She struggles to get them off as though they are a disease; lesions she must painfully peel from her skin. At the same time, her fear of being naked alone is quite obvious... it does not stop her, it drives her.

³³ Taken from Hijikata Tatsumi’s “To Prison” with permissions for use from MIT press, provided it is not published outside the Texas A&M University thesis archives. All remaining lines in this scene spoken by NARRATOR are quoted from this source.

NARRATOR

“That I am dazed by the beauty of a prison gate is nothing but a posture of perplexity with myself, made to stand at the minimum distance from being naked. That is how terrifying it is to be naked, yet in the outside world we are already completely naked. For today the authority and significance of a prison gate being shut are declining. In any case, it is equivalent to being released. I will be carried merrily. Speech prohibited, sound contrived not to reach my ears, in garb of nondescript color, I shall continue to be conscious that I am still standing naked as is. No theatre matches this one, which is equipped with the perfect mechanism for my destructive acts against production and morality. I see my own dance in a state of joyful group bathing in prison, and I see inmates on death row in the fall of modern civilization and in the family crest of its good sense. I see the original form of my dance in their walk.”

ACTORS 1 and 2

Ribcup

MISS

After I had finished crying and pulled myself together, a close friend of mine called me. He’s also incarcerated... in fact, the majority of my closest friends are incarcerated or on some kind of parole or probation. I remember asking him something like “is it crazy that I kind of wish I could spend some time in prison?” (*Pause, asking audience*) Is it? (*She chuckles lightly to herself, momentarily losing herself in thought*). I don’t remember his response. Maybe I didn’t care...

NARRATOR

“A criminal on death row made to walk to the guillotine is already a dead person even as he clings, to the very end, to life. The fierce antagonism between life and death is pushed to the extreme and cohesively expressed in this lone miserable being who, in the name of the law, is forced into an unjust condition. A person not walking but made to walk; a person not living but made to live; a person not dead but made to be dead must, in spite of such total passivity, paradoxically expose the radical vitality of human nature.”

ACTORS 1 and 2

Ribbup

MISS

Or, rather, it wasn’t that I didn’t care what my friend’s response was, but I just couldn’t hear it... I felt so uncomfortably disgusted by my own privilege. It was like I had been wondering the earth with a socially accepted... No... highly valued.... No... a mainstream, middle-class, beautifully backwards form of leprosy. Yes, I’ve been told I am a bit melodramatic. I guess, the best way I can describe it is through a short story...

Once upon a time I spent a week in La Morita, Mexico. A suburb, if you will, of Tijuana. I showered once that week. I slept on a cold floor stuffed in a smelly room with about 20

to 25 other un-showered bodies. We ate with the locals; held hands with AIDs patients clinging to their death beds; cleaned, sang, and cooked with homeless elderly folks; and basked in the stench of burning trash in the streets. I hated almost every minute of it; I can't tell you how much I fucking love being clean. At the same time, I never wanted to go home. I contemplated losing myself in a crowd of locals; being an "alien" on the other side (*she cringes at her own word choice*).... I can't tell if you if was guilt, or if it was the fact that amongst all the pain and suffering, goodness never seemed more clear to me... Happiness never seemed simpler to obtain... It was the little things, you know?

At this point MISS should be down to her socks, bra and underwear. She slowly and painfully removes her socks, then struggles with the clasp to unfasten her bra.... She never quite gets it...

ACTORS 1 and 2

Ribbip

NARRATOR

"I am dumbfounded by the bodies of young creatures who, bereft of any ethical echo, overrun the streets. I am making the subject of my work the warm sands, rapid vehicles, dramatic chases, and naked conversations that have removed the punishment given by society from their shared reality of behaving like unlovable youth."

MISS

(Speaking to her bra in frustration) Come on...

NARRATOR

"I believe—through incessant conversation with young creatures who stand at the minimum distance from the primal experience and through work that plays with their bodies—that they can be perfected as my naked soldiers. Human remodeling will be accomplished only by getting involved with a dreaming lethal weapon that has long ignored the poverty of politics."

*Lights fade to **Blackout**. In complete darkness we here...*

ACTORS 1 and 2

Ribbit... Ribbit...

Scene 2: The "Joker" Prepares

Lights come up on MISS in her bedroom again, she sits on the floor in her undergarments, no pillows, no blankets, just her clothing scattered about. She leans up against NARRATOR's cell for comfort. She has the TV remote in her hand, but is hesitant to turn it on....

FROGs A-C and ACTORs 1 and 2 are now JOKERs 1-5. They sit USR, painting each other's faces as "jokers."

MISS

Preparations. -:-PM (*Turns TV on*)

Following the same conventions used in the second scene of ACT I, any references to locations should be relevant to the performance location.

UNCLE SAM

Last night, Lake Bryan, a— (*Light groan*)

NARRATOR

A relaxation destination for Brazos county locals became a symbol of tragedy. As the sun set, hints of pink and orange reflected off Texas clouds, which shortly after began to weep, as a young man of only 15 years old was taken, far too soon, from this earth. As authorities arrived, witnesses are described to have been in awe by the magnificent colors, claiming he may be lost in the physical sense, but it was clear his spirit remained. One woman said "it was perhaps him who painted the sky" so vibrantly.

The Brazos County Police Department has not released the victim's name, reporting the teenager to have been unethically placed in an unsafe living situation by CPS. Friends of the victim were devastated by the news, explaining he had little support at home, and was often forced into unsafe business ventures as a means to acquire basic living necessities—

(Changing the channel)

Thank you for joining us this evening. Tonight, we explore our countries dirty little secrets with an inside scoop on the United States Prison-Industrial Complex. It is no secret our country, the so called "Land of Opportunity" incarcerates more of our population than any other country in the world. Let me begin by deconstructing our education system through exploring patterns of racial segregation in schools, which, I might add, has a direct correlation to inequalities in the education system across these boundaries. Without equal access to quality education, disadvantaged, minority youths are often pushed towards a dangerous cycle of oppression. So why is social mobility for these particular community members so diff—

(Changing the channel)

"Michael Brown Sr. will say very little, because he doesn't want to miss speak because of such emotion that are going through him, that will later be held against him [...] We went through as much evidence as we could, and saw how completely unfair this process was. We object publically and loudly as we can on behalf of Michael Brown Jr.'s family, that this process is broken. The process should be indicted [...] Let's be very honest

about this process, we have a local prosecutor who has symbiotic relationship with the local police, and the local police officers who sit in judgement whether they indict the police when they brutalize or kill a young person from our community. And normally, that prosecutor has no [...] regards for the young person of color. And so, [...] we could foresee what the outcome was going to be [...] but, it is awfully troubling when you look at what was released, and you hear about the police officer who shot Michael Brown Jr. in broad daylight, the unarmed teenager, and you hear he testified for four hours. And, you had to scratch your head, kind of like we all did, to say “when is the prosecutor going to cross examine the killer of an unarmed person [...] where was his credibly ever challenged?”³⁴

MISS

MISS turns off the TV in anger. She begins to dress herself again, this time in something wildly colorful. The last thing she puts on is her black sweater, still painted with the FROGS hands. Addressing the “actors” ...

Are you all hearing this? Does it not disturb you? Does it not make you sick to your stomach, the world we... still.... Live in. By the way, y’all are perverts sitting there like peeping toms. I know, it’s hard not to look, but come... Sickos... you watch the TV like that too? The news? You see this shit every day and do nothing? Just watch? Really? Does it get you off? Nobody even turns a blind eye anymore... It’s like reality TV. We’ve become so accustomed to the news, the corruption, that we just watch it happen right in front of our noses, till it’s as good as invisible. It doesn’t bother you? Sickos!

MISS looks genuinely offended, then breaks into soft laughter...

Aaahhh haaa... Got you. I mean, I do think it’s pretty sick that we’re so accustomed to hearing tragedy on the news that we no longer take action. But I can’t blame you. I can’t hold myself any higher than you either... In fact, at a certain point I just stopped watching the news for anything more than background noise as I am getting ready in the morning. It’s all bullshit, really, propaganda, a system of brainwashing and control. We’re a lonely fucking crowd.

MISS begins to put on make-up as she talks, she seems unconcerned with her story at first, emotionally disconnected...

I got a letter the other day from a close friend of mine... yes, another prison pal. They denied his parole... yet again. This happens every year honestly. He writes and calls me saying stuff like “this is my year, I’ve done all my classes, no write-ups or altercations in over a year, the parole hearing went well, they seemed to really like me, yadda yadda yadda...” Then sure enough, right when he’s collected JUST enough hope to believe

³⁴ Quoted from “LIVE: Michael Brown's family speaks after the Ferguson grand jury decision,” found on YouTube. All comments were disabled for the video.

he'll be getting out... BAM... Some shit like a drug raid, or prison riot breaks out and he just so happened to be in the line of fire... and bye-bye parole. This year he got so close too, man...and then shortly after, there was a fight. I get this voicemail.

JOKER 4 finishes with his/her make-up, and begins helping MISS apply her make-up...

JOKER 4

Hi! This is me. I am just calling to check up on you. How are you doing? Call me back as soon as you can mija, I have some news. Call me back, okay? Bye.

MISS

I already knew what the news was. I didn't need to hear it. I had my own pressures to deal with. Another day passes, another voicemail...

JOKER 5, also finished with his/her make-up, joins to help with MISS' make up...

JOKER 5

Hi mija, this is me... call me back. I really need to talk to you.

MISS

No.

JOKER 5

It's important. I hope you're okay. Okay. Call me. Bye.

MISS

It's never good news with that woman. Don't get me wrong. I love her dearly. For real, she treats me like blood. I've never known loyalty and love like this outside my own family... but every time she calls me... bad news. Not the kind of bad news you actually see in the news...

Finished with his/her make-up, JOKER 2 joins JOKERs 4 & 5

JOKER 2

Mija, my daughter... she has cancer. I went out to help her for treatment. I can't stand seeing her in that kind of pain. My poor baby, and the hospital is so expensive, and the doctors... oh my goodness, sometimes I don't think they care. Her insurance ran out... can you believe they sent her home in that condition?

JOKER 4

Mija, ohhh my gosh, everything is terrible. My own granddaughter, she steals from me. Just takes money out of my purse without asking, and I already give her money all the time. She doesn't appreciate me.... Mija, are you okay? Do you need money? I am going to put some money in your bank account this afternoon okay?

MISS

No. No, please don't. I don't deserve it. I am too tired.

JOKER 5

Mija, one of my nephews was shot. Killed. He left a baby girl behi—.

JOKER 4

Oh, mija, my brother just passed away. I have to go to the funer—

JOKER 2

Mija, my own son... my very own son won't talk to me. I don't know what to do, I am so hurt. It feels like nobody cares about me sometimes... all they want is money from me...

JOKERs 1 & 3 now join the group in doing MISS' make-up...

JOKERs 1-5 together

Mija, call me back, I have to tell you, something very important...

MISS

AAAHHHH!!!! FUCK! I just can't—I can't handle it... because I can't DO anything. This woman is a saint... why? Why is she at the center of all these struggles? Why did these people come into my life? I can't ignore, anything, anymore... it's all very real. I can't be content just being one of the clones, a robot. I see it. I see how the world around us tries to trick us into thinking we've reach utopia!

MISS' phone rings, she is now surrounded by JOKERs 1-5... she cannot be seen, but she can be heard.

Hello?

NARRATOR

Hi, mija! How are you doing?

MISS

I'm fine, how are you?

NARRATOR

Oh, you know, I am okay. How is school?

MISS

It's kicking my butt. I feel like I am drowning... but I'm almost there.

NARRATOR

Oh, my gosh, you poor thing... Have you heard from him?

UNCLE SAM

Oh, no...

MISS

No. Not at all. For a little while...

NARRATOR

Oh—you won't believe what happened...

JOKERS 1-5 reveal MISS whose face is now painted like a "joker" as well. They stand behind her like a chorus now. JOKER 3 runs and grabs a joker hat from NARRATOR, returns, and places it on her head. She then speaks...

MISS

Try me...

MISS takes a deep breath and says...

So, I guess a group of Mexicans broke out into a fight across the recreation yard while he was playing basketball. The correctional officers proceeded to detain all Mexicans who were outside at the time, regardless of whether or not they were involved with the fight. He called them out saying...

JOKER 1

What about that guy? He was playing basketball with us too? Why aren't you detaining him?

UNCLE SAM

He's white... we're only taking the Mexicans.

MISS

They charged him with assault, took away his parole, his phone privileges, his contact visits, his commissary.... She starts to read me his letter...

JOKERS 1-5

Dear Mom

NARRATOR

They charged me... they charged all of us mom. For no reason. I know that I am receiving this bad karma because I did bad things too. It wouldn't be so bad if I had actually done something, but mom... believe me when I say I have been trying... so hard. I cannot stay here anymore, I just can't. I am going to do everything in my power

to get transferred to a new unit. I know that means I might be farther away, I could be shipped anywhere in Texas, but I just can't be here anymore.

JOKER 2

Mija, when I went to see him, oh my gosh he looked so skinny...

NARRATOR

Mom, they have not fed us in days. They put me in this cell with another inmate, I swear to god, we cannot even stand up and turn around without hitting each other. The beds... well, I like fit on half of one... I hope they put me back into segregation. It's hard because I have to be in a cell alone 23 hours a day, but at least in there I can focus on myself...

Mom, I am not defeated, I will keep looking forward, but I feel hopeless. I want to come home. I want to come home so bad. You know, I do not want to leave this earth before you do, but right now I feel like my cousin and everyone we've lost are the lucky ones... at least they don't have to deal with this bullshit anymore. I don't know what to do, I just know I can't stay here anymore.

JOKER 4

We haven't had water for about 23 days now.... Can you believe that? They turn it on for five minutes in the morning, and five at night so we can fill up water bottles, and flush the toilets. Do you know what it's like, how it smell. People are shitting in bags and throwing them into the hallway so they don't have to marinate in their own stench all day...

NARRATOR

Mija, it is so hard for me. I am 75, people always say to me "why don't you retire, relax," but I can't do that mija, you know why?

MISS

Why?

JOKER 4

Because when I am at work I am too busy to think. At home, all I do is cry (*Beginning to crack*), I just come home and cry mija. I don't have anybody I can talk to about this. You are the only one who is helping me get through this, you and my daughter. Thank you so much for listening. It is so hard. I just miss him so much, I want him to come home and I can't stand to see him suffer, see him cry.

MISS

At first, it didn't hit me... I'd been through this before... many times you know? Oh, dad's back in jail? Oh, roommate violated parole and got caught? Oh, boyfriend is spending weekends in the slammer now? It's just a part of life, at this point... It wasn't

until she called me, until I could really hear the pain in her voice... I felt the agony she carried, and I took some of that with me....

Do you ever think... Outside, all of us who play integral roles in the system... we're actually the crazy ones? Those who are locked up... they know what's really happening?

Blackout

Scene 3: Hailing "Spectactors"

Lights come up and we see MISS and the five JOKERS on stage each with a pad of paper and a pencil, writing intensely. NARRATOR's cell is still CS. The sound of pencils writing on paper fades, filling the space for about a minute. The JOKERS makes eye contact with a guest-actor, speaking directly to him/her. Each joker begins speaking his/her story overlapping another generating sound imagery that communicate the mass amount of people tied up in this system. They can overlap as follows... While they are not speaking, they continue writing... When JOKER 1 lifts his/her head to speak, "house" lights fade up to half.

JOKER 1

"It is important to know and understand the mission of the department of corrections if you would like to establish an arts program. Tie all off your work with the inmates to the mission statement so that you will reveal how your program supports the mission [...]
As artists, we are driven to bend the rules we chafe at the idea of control over our creative process" (*Tofteland, New Lives 2011*)

JOKER 3

"These children are constantly being told what they can and cannot do, and what they can and cannot say... and to respect their elders no matter what... to respect authority no matter what without having any sense of how respect is defined. To give them an opportunity to show authority as they see it or tell adults what they believe makes a good parent... to show a police system that

JOKER 2

"But whatever whatever the reason, I felt for the first time I wanted to be friends with these girls. I was no longer the facilitator and they were no longer participants. It was a chance to see that we were all more than the mistakes we have made and more than the pain we have suffered through. We were all actresses, creating art, together" (*Taylor, New Lives 2011*).

may take advantage... to show a society that takes advantage of youth, of innocence" (*Winn 2011*).

JOKER 5

"I went to prison at thirty-six years old, but it wasn't the first time I was incarcerated. I was incarcerated at thirteen years old for being 'incorrigible and beyond parent control.' Then, the system incarcerated youth for that. I went out with my girlfriend shoplifting. We both got charged with petty theft. For that, they locked me up for a year and a half. I had the misfortune of going to California Youth Authority when they were building a new facility for girls. They, of course needed bodies, so instead of sending me home, I was sent to this lock-up facility. They didn't release me until after my grandmother died, my fifteenth year" (*McCray, Inner Lives 2003*).

JOKER 4

"I graduated in May 1975 with a nurse's certificate. I found out that I was pregnant, which I didn't know at graduation [...] Then my boyfriend immediately drafted into the army. I was thinking of leaving, too, and was waiting for him to send me a ticket after basic training. I was willing to be the military mother and military wife. Things just didn't work out. He acknowledged the child and sent me some money through the mail, but he did his thing in the army while I was stuck here in the city waiting on him. I started to have these ideas about stopped prostitution. I thought that is a woman's body was going to be used in that way, she should be paid" (*Rea Ann, Inner Lives 2003*).

JOKER 1

"I have three daughters and three granddaughters and one grandson. I school after the ninth grade because I got pregnant and I just kind of quit. I wasn't really encouraged to continue school once I was pregnant and I didn't want to go anymore. I had my first child when I was fifteen. I had my second when I was seventeen. Then I got married at seventeen. My husband was a year older than me. He worked for a bed manufacturer. My youngest daughter was born while I was in prison. I really

JOKER 5

“Nationwide we disproportionately incarcerate poor people, and people of color, marginalize families affected by criminal justice, promote prison expansion as economic development in deindustrialized cities and rural towns, and funnel young people out of schools and into prisons in these communities” (Taylor, *New Lives* 2011).

JOKER 2

“When I went to prison, I was not there to accept a life sentence that didn’t belong to me. I was there until I could prove that I had not committed that crime. During that time in prison, I would not lose my dignity, my pride, and my respect. I would not give it and I would demand it. I would not get institutionalized. Therefore I didn’t do what the others did. I didn’t watch reruns to television. I became a sports fanatic, because if you look at golf, basketball, football, hockey, tennis, whatever the sport might be, that’s today, not yesterday [...] You look at commercials, and things that bring you up-to-date on today’s technology and whatever, and you get used to what the world is still like [...] I guess three months went by and I got a pass to come to the major’s office. I went up and she said that she needed to talk to me about

feel like her surrogate mother because I wasn’t there to raise her as I raised my other children” (Marilyn, *Inner Lives* 2003).

JOKER 3

“I graduated in May 1975 with a nurse’s certificate. I found out that I was pregnant, which I didn’t know at graduation [...] Then my boyfriend immediately drafted into the army. I was thinking of leaving, too, and was waiting for him to send me a ticket after basic training. I was willing to be the military mother and military wife. Things just didn’t work out. He acknowledged the child and sent me some money through the mail, but he did his thing in the army while I was stuck here in the city waiting on him. I started to have these ideas about prostitution. I thought that is a woman’s body was going to be used in that way, she should be paid” (Rea Ann, *Inner Lives* 2003).

destroying state property. By that time, I just wasn't going to be accused anymore of something I didn't do. I said that I had not destroyed state property and I didn't know what she was talking about. She looked at me and she kind of smiled, and she said, 'You really don't. But what you're going to have to learn in that you are state property [...] and when you are not eating, we think that perhaps you're trying to starve yourself and we have to make sure. If I don't see you in that line at least once a day, I'm going to have to write you up for destroying state property'" (*Brown, Inner Lives 2003*).

JOKER 4

"It made me think about things differently than the way I used to do things. It brought back a lot of memories of time I never thought about or put together all at once. Now, it's like you brought all these people together and you put it all into one story. You get inspired by telling your own story. I do. When I'm telling something to somebody I think to myself I can't believe I did that, man! I don't want to do that no more. Or I talk about something good, and I'm like 'that's pretty good!' I get inspired by my own conversation. By telling my story I actually get to hear it, not knowing I had that story eating in there. I never looked at it the way I am telling it" (*Dowling, New Lives 2011*).

Finally, the sound of writing fades out and VOICE is heard. MISS' head rises from her notepad to listen, she is comforted by this voice, just as she was in scene three of ACT I.

VOICE

I probably have *that 30 minutes* or that two hours and *that's it*
I may never see that kid again
ever
so what am I going to do in that 30 minutes to 2 hours that
maybe is *positive* maybe brings a *smile* maybe they *laugh* maybe they
figure something out for themselves
you know
and it's about *them* finding their *own*
tools
not me giving them tools
I can't give them anything,
but *them accessing the strength in*
themselves

VOICE and MISS together

I *truly truly truly* believe in the possibility within impossibility

MISS stands and walks towards NARRATOR. She sticks her arms in his cell as seen in the very first scene of ACT I, only this time she is more calm and confident. During VOICE's following line, someone MISS slips through the bars of NARRATOR's cell. They embrace tightly.

VOICE

when people say its impossible I don't believe that.
The word *possible* is inside *impossible*
which means it's going to *work*
and it may take years, and it may take *a lot* of blood sweat and tears [...]
one of the things I say all the time is
when you're tired of throwing yourself up against the brick wall, you're going to
stop

MISS turns towards the audience from inside the cell, and stars almost angrily. During the remainder of this speech MISS changes her posture, slips back out through the cell bars, and she begins an impression of what a stereotypical, trouble-making, gangsta "thug" kid might look like. First, she pulls her pants down just low enough to look "gangsta." She walks throughout the space with "swag." Throughout this speech JOKERS 1-5 are prompted to do the same one by one, holding the same (or similar) persona as MISS. They walk around the space, mean mugging audience members, miming drug deals with each other, etc...

you know and so

Its *not* going into something thinking you're going to save the
world and be a hero
because you can't and

Stand, JOKER 1

I think that's what trips me up a little bit with that first young man
that I worked with is

I wanted to do something really good for that kid
which to me meant finding his parents
because from *my* perspective *my* social construct
you find the parents

I did not know that that was one of the worst possible things I could do
for that child [...]

Stand JOKER 2

he was shot by another 15 year old

*MISS has stopped CS (in front of NARRATOR's cell) at this point and pulled a
gun from her pocket. It is obviously only her hand, no prop should be used for
this scene...*

did I pull the trigger?

MISS points her "gun" at an audience member....

no

*MISS "pulls" the trigger with a swift movement of her thumb downward, miming
the impact of a gunshot as her arm jerks up and lightly and her upper body
backwards. No gun sound is heard.*

but did I *help* to set to that path?
Yes absolutely I did.

Stand JOKER 3

But who's to say that you know
Who's to say that had the kid stayed here the same thing would've
have happened?

MISS “re-cocks” the “gun” and aims at another audience member

It *could* have there is no telling
but I *do* know *my place* in his story
I can't deny that

MISS pulls the trigger again in a mechanical fashion, almost identical to her first shot. Again, no gun sound is heard...

I know what I did [...]

Stand JOKER 4

it's kind of funny when I was in high school,
I guess I was a senior in high school
I was around 17
I had an English teacher that used to be a social worker
and she told us some things and I knew at *that moment* I could *never* be a
social
worker because it would just kill me because I'm too intense, I get too
involved,
what's really funny (lightly laughing)

Stand JOKER 5

was I was supposed to be an anthropologist [...]
but here I am right in the middle of it right? [...]

MISS “re-cocks” her “gun” one last time, aims it at a 3rd audience member, this time she is apprehensive. All the JOKERs are walking around through the space at this point. MISS has become stone-cold still.

because I'm in the classroom in the university
I get to share *something* like the story about that first boy
sharing that story is important to me
I'm teaching ethics right know.
And when is the *right* thing, the *bad* thing, when is following that law *not*
the *best* thing to do, and I'm not advocating breaking the laws or anything
like that,
but here is a *real* story where we did *exactly* what we were supposed to
do, now who's culpable,
right *I followed* the rules and *look what happened*

MISS pulls her trigger with a swift movement of her thumb downward. The shockingly loud sound of a gunshot is heard only this time, everyone on stage collapses instantaneously. MISS and JOKERs 1-5 lay on the stage dead.

NARRATOR

(In desperation) Hands up, don't shoot!

As they lay on the stage the song "Amazing Grace" fades in. The image of an American flag blowing in the wind is projected onto the back of the theatre. There is no need for a scrim or projection screen, the more distorted the image, the better. As the music reaches the words "Saved a wretch like me"

MISS and JOKERs 1-5 come to their feet (or knees) and take individual boalian statue poses. These poses should signify varying forms of oppression relating to the prisons system, and is held for about 30 seconds. Lights come up behind them, they are back-lit into silhouettes besides what the projection shines on their faces.

NARRATOR

No justice, no peace!

MISS and JOKERs together

No justice, no peace!

The group moves into a second pose, representing oppressions in the free world. They hold this first pose for at least 60 seconds. While holding pose NARRATOR slips through the bars of if cell; however, his legged is chained it and we can hear the sound of his chain dragging on the floor. He joins the group as they move into a final statue and the music fades out. This last statue should signify an offering of their stories

NARRATOR creates a slow beat using the sound of his chains on the group. S/he does this for a few seconds before MISS unfreezes from her pose and begins reciting a poem. The beat slowly increases in speak and intensity. JOKERs 1-5 recite the poem as well each starting from the beginning, but entering at different times in order to create a waterfall. That is, JOKER 1 begins the poem when MISS begins the 4th verse, JOKER 2 begins when JOKER 1 begins the 4th verse and so on... They do not unfreeze until they begin speaking

ALL

My body is your body
My essence is yours too
Defined and redefined
We are tools of the city scape
Corporate buildings birth our bodies
They tower over seemingly insignificant flesh

Defining and redefining
When, where, how, why, and you are the "what"
To not surrender is impertinent
Identity is property for economic exchange
Steel beams and one way streets diminish
Spirit and essence
We cross corporate barriers
Branded as gifts to the FBI
Where people equal money
And dark skin glistens like gold and diamonds
I could not see you, but I could feel you
In my body as your body³⁵

The room falls silent for a few seconds, the sound of light rain shows fades in one last time, and NARRATOR recites the above poem, alone as s/he moves back to, and re-enters the cell. While s/he does this MISS and the ensemble grab the barriers which were used during the entrances. They move NARRATOR in his/her cell back USR, and position themselves into the same barrier patterns as seen in the entrance.

Once NARRATOR finishes speaking the poem and barriers are in place, miss says...

MISS

Neither here, nor there... Its --PM

MISS then navigates these barriers, moving under some, passing through others, and exits the theater space. The sound of the door is heard opening, performance remain in their positions, and liminal showers are heard until the last audience member exists the space...

END PLAY

³⁵ This poem was written at the end of my fieldwork as I was training as a long-term volunteer with CPAP. I was never granted access to these boys.

V. THROAT CHAKRA: TALK-BACK

“That to which one is surrendered will “put words into one’s mouth,” and speech then will reveal what one has chosen.”

The most difficult part about devising the script was the superfluous amount of information I was tempted to include. Arcak's defining moment and her position as a prison arts facilitator exposes the gravity of the United States post-modern panoptic system. Her story reaches far beyond prison walls, illuminating how race, gender, and socioeconomic class intersect with power structures. Because of the broad range of issues in which her narratives commented, I was compelled to provide imagery supported by relevant current events in order to illuminate how these issues play out in our day to day lives. She illustrates Foucault's scholarship on power, demonstrating that power is only exercised over the free, not acting on the individual, but through the government of individuality. Those who are incarcerated lack individual freedom, thus no power can be performed upon them. Outside the prison, we navigate a world of options from which we can create a sense of individual expression. It is this very freedom which those in power manipulate. This was the starting point from which I began the script writing process. Power cannot exist without the possibility of resistance, and therein lies the “Treehouse Project,” Arcak's personal narratives, and storytelling practices. Her access to audiences as a body for voiceless bodies delivers power to the boys within her community. Though she must work within the RTC's rules and regulations, she breaks free of those barriers by sharing her stories as a means to inspire critical thought.

Though Arcak's personal narratives only emerge within the final scenes of act one and two, the way in which her narrative is organized and moves forward influenced the shape of this entire ritual performance. Her narratives' transcriptions were the foundational texts around which I devised the script. Placing her narratives in conversations with the theories I used in order to develop characters and establish how the ritual story moves forward allowed me to highlight the varying roles Arcak plays as a prison arts facilitator, as well as draw parallels between Arcak's experiences in order to inform an understanding of my own. Her narratives are, in many ways, like to the ritual process Miss experiences throughout the performance. Turner's theory of reaching *communitas* through rituals helps interpret flows of affect within these experiences.

The affective power of her defining moment molds her identity in the field; it informs how she sees herself as a female, an arts facilitator, and a panoptic tool. I argue that *communitas* is both an ongoing process with the boys in Arcak's field, but also something that happens between prison theatre practitioners with the creation of an imagined community of insiders within this field. Turner describes alternations between two models of human interactions:

The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system on politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less." The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (96).

Arcak's narrative distinctly exposes a hierarchical system. She makes visible the limitations of her voice when emphasizing the power of politics and law through her

inability to intervene in sending the boy back to his mother. My own narratives, as presented by Miss in the script, addressing my time spent with the TreeHouse project, mirror Arcak's experiences when interpreted as a ritual process.

Arcak's defining moment narrative is performed by "Voice" in the first act of my script. In exploring her defining moment narrative alone (separate from my experiences in the field), I asked: How do the aesthetics of power in her story operate in her personal and professional life, and how do they influence her ideological approach to ethics in a field where simple solutions merely graze the surface of complex problems? Moreover, how do the answers to these questions inform her role as a prison arts facilitator, and what forms of resistance do they engender? I found her liminal position in the field offers possibilities for reimagining her role as a prison arts practitioner through using personal narrative as a tactic itself. I argue her use of storytelling is tactical due to her enthusiasm for entering the field blindly. In starting new projects blindly, she can push boundaries as she learns what they are. Once boundaries have been established she works towards transgressing those boundaries using affect, by offering her experiences through storytelling to people in her community.

Arcak takes a similar approach in storytelling as D. Soyini Madison uses in *Acts of Activism* by self-reflexively narrating her experiences with "at-risk" youth. She performatively challenges the power of the penal system by making visible what is cloaked from the greater community. That is, "the performative turn responds to the twin conditions of bodiless voices, for example, in ethnographic writing; and voiceless bodies who desire to resist the colonizing powers of discourse" (Langellier 1999). Arcak

explains, when addressing social issues that it all comes down to voice and access: access to clean water, health care, education, etc. – and who has a voice to be able to access these things. She argues that those who are in positions to be heard have an obligation to fight for access to such foundational sources for those who lack “voice” to fight for themselves. Here Arcak is situated as a “bodiless voice” speaking out for “voiceless bodies” caught in an oppressive policing system. It is because of this I name her character in the scripted performance “Voice,” and also why Voice is not seen and only heard.

I use family as a trope in analyzing the complexity of affective flows as Arcak experiences them in relation to her own identity as a woman. I draw from Kristen M. Langellier and Eric E. Peterson’s theories on performing family narrative to explore Arcak’s narratives as a means for coping and self-situating in the field. Langellier and Peterson explain “[f]amily storytelling is survival strategy of small groups in which they articulate who they are to themselves, for themselves and for the next generations, engaging memory and anticipation as embodied and material practices of human communication” (Langellier and Peterson 2004). Arcak’s narratives help her understand her own role as a prison arts facilitator, and as a woman who is tempted to nurture the boys in the RTC as her own family.

At the same time, Arcak uses her narratives to expose the dangers of her family-oriented mentality, in a way that mentored my development of this project. She, like many other prison arts facilitators, encourages anyone who is interested to pursue prison theatre and other arts programming with incarcerated populations. In this, Arcak makes

it her obligation to illuminate her mistakes to me through personal defining moment/family narratives, in which the “self-focusing text can anchor a family’s definition and bolster cultural survival” (Langellier and Peterson 2004). Arcak’s personal narratives served to welcome me into the family through an orientation of family “rules.” These rules, I came to find, constituted a rite of passage I must endure before fully understanding their importance.

Responding to my question if this work was her “calling” she sets up her defining moment by figuratively placing herself in a maternal role for the detained youths with whom she works. Arcak is conscious of how she identifies with the boys at the RTC; she recognizes how her work, perhaps, fills a void for her desire to have had more children. Yet, she also generalizes her maternal role as a gender-specific social expectation. This generalization is tactical; “[g]enerality of knowledge provides some safeguard against both loss and distortion” (Langellier and Peterson 2004). While Langellier and Peterson are speaking about the transmission and diffusion of culture among family members, in Arcak’s case the process of generalizing her position is slightly different, and the motif more complex. It is emotionally dangerous to become too deeply invested in the boys’ lives, as their futures and well-being are far from her control. Hartnett explains, “even as we tackle the day’s pressing problems, we also need to find ways not to become consumed by those struggles” (Hartnett 2010). Arcak generalizes her maternal role as a tactic of self-preservation, and perhaps it is a coping method in response to her defining moment, which largely influenced how she approaches applied arts in her field. At the same time, it still serves as a safeguard for

culture by validating her maternal role and the bonds she builds between the boys at the RTC. As the heart chakra teaches, her storytelling helps her both accept heartache without becoming apathetic.

Beginning her defining moment narrative, Arcak establishes her relationship with the boy. She states “I loved him, he was amazing,” reinforcing her initial impulse to take on a maternal role while in the field. Opening her story in this manner situates her narratives as a practice of family storytelling. Though she eventually resituates her position within her narratives as both a practice of ethics and self-preservation, she is unable to remove a profound quality of affect, by which her experiences with the boy from New Orleans have entered into her bodily archive. Family narratives participate in control and regulation: preserving that family, its image, and the bodies it encompasses. “The family’s first concern is itself and its own survival [...] and ward off other threats to family image and practices” (Langellier and Peterson 2004). Though the boy from New Orleans has passed away, Arcak maintains a maternal obligation to protect who he was, as well as their relationship. Placing him in comparison to her son, she justifies why their connection was so intense, while constituting her identity as a maternal figure in his life. This was not only communicated through her word choice and organization of the story, but also through oral characteristics in her storytelling performance.

In the script, I draw from Della Pollock's “Practicing Pain” as a guide to poetically transcribe Arcak’s personal narratives. Poetic transcriptions help to emphasize rhythm, pauses, and stressed moments in speech, thus including aspects of narrative performance incapable of being fully translated into words. In fact, during a staged

reading of the script, the actor who read for Voice aroused my own bodily archive and I felt as though Arcak and I were back in the café for that first interview. I remembered when and how she laughed as she introduced this boy to me through her narrative, and the actress' vocal inflections were nearly identical to Arcak's original performance. At the same time, I was not experiencing a memory of our interview verbatim. What did not read within the poetic transcriptions were changes of speed as she spoke, and the varying intensities with which she uttered particular words. Those seemingly minor performative elements are important.

Upon introducing the boy from New Orleans, Arcak deemphasizes his weaknesses by increasing the speed of her speech, and reiterating the precarity of his situation. She highlights his unique qualities stressing important descriptive words by slowing her speech down and shifting the tone of her voice. Generally her tone would raise into a higher register while communicating something about the boy that could potentially be seen as negative. She brightened her speech, juxtaposed against possibly negative aspects generating a comedic, lighthearted quality of affect. In doing this she situates the boys as an average, American kid, with both an air of innocence and charming mischief. Arcak also protects their story and his memory from being misread, by offering her own interpretations to anecdotes within the narrative. For instance, as she talks about how the boy would shove his pockets full of candy to sell at school, the tone of her voice raised slightly, and she spoke the word "full" with an upward inflection and smile on her face, as she lightly chuckled at this memory. Following this anecdote she states "cause how else does a 12-year-old make money in that condition? You know?"

You're in a completely strange place, but *that's how quick his mind was.*" Finally, by offering such anecdotes she individualizes the boy, and honors him as having a unique identity—which is often stripped from disadvantaged populations, especially in the criminal justice system.

The last excerpt of Arcak's narrative in the first act is a turning point by which she resituates herself and the boy from an immediate family dynamic into, what I will rhetorically position as, an extended family dynamic that includes the panopticon. This section of Arcak's personal narrative becomes a "family classic." Langellier and Peterson argue "[t]he experiential immediacy and dramatization of performed [family classic] narration works to increase audience involvement and sweep them into a community of rapport that deters critical responses and deflects discussion" (Langellier and Peterson 2004). In this context I argue Arcak certainly aims to increase audience involvement by supporting her story with commentary on structures of power in which everyone is familiar (family, education, state law). Additionally, her revelation of the boy's fate contextualizes the family classic in a way that actually encourages productive critical discussions. She begins her defining story in a very positive way; thereby creating possibilities for a greater affective impact on listeners once the tone of her story turns tragic. She uses affect as a tactic to inspire her audience to question the ethics of legal structures by narrating the loss of her "son" against the backdrop of the panopticon. Arcak has the ability to use affect as a tactic for resistance because she herself has been deeply affected by this lived experience. Her speech in this final portion of her narrative in act one is rapid. She communicates a sense of urgency while emphasizing the power

of state and legal structures. She also speaks about the legal boundaries she encounters in lists, as if it had been rehearsed and recontextualized for many different settings.

In the second act, Arcak's narratives communicate a heightened awareness of her role as a prisons arts facilitator. Consider this evidence of an awakened crown chakra; she embodies a level of self-realization that emerges through profound ritual experiences, countless hours of meditation (reflection), and an awareness of how one is connected to the universe in which we exist. Arcak admits, as she brings her narrative to a close, that she has supported the panoptic system, which became apparent to her through the boy from New Orleans's tragic death. This omission is visible in her references to the process as a "we" process: "after we found his mother." Her narrative communicates a humbled position as she projects a need to protect herself, explaining only after they found the boy's parents did anyone speak against it. In these moments she brings her paradoxical position to the surface, entering a space of liminality.

While in this liminal state, Arcak repositions her relationship with the boy as she says, "well, I don't know what the parents were doing." In that short instance she recognizes that he was not her son, and that she cannot be held responsible for the tragedy of his death. She both protects herself emotionally from the tremendous pain of losing one's own child, and establishes her position as resistant to the legal structure for whom she does hold responsible both in the legal sense, and in the way they shaped how she addressed his situation. She is not his mother, though embodies an obligation and desire to honor his life and death. Here, we see *communitas* has been achieved between Arcak and the boy, as he lives inextricably within her, and inspires how she works with

youths at the RTC. Turner describes post-liminal attributes of the medieval knight's vigil stating “[h]is subsequent power is thought to partially spring from his profound immersion in humility” (Turner 1977). Perhaps Arcak's effortless ability to make people feel comfortable and important is a product of post-liminality. Arcak's defining moment resonates throughout this description of her role in the field. No longer does she place herself as a maternal figure, nor does she describe her role in the lives of the boys at the RTC as particularly significant. She marks the unpredictability of outcomes that may be engendered through participants in her program, while emphasizing the importance of her role in creating a situation and environment where they can access their own tools.

Because of this approach which guides her application of prison arts at the RTC, I use Augusto Boal's “Forum Theatre” as a rhetorical tool for explaining Arcak's active roles with the boys in the RTC and in her community. Forum theatre contains three essential components: The “*actors*” (representing a social issue), “*Joker*” (performance facilitator), and “*spect-actors*” (interactive audience members). Boal believed that theatre should be used as a rehearsal for real life, calling audience members to be more than passive spectators of a performance, but active agents in exploring solutions for social change. Upon achieving *communitas*, in her narrative we see Arcak arise as a *Joker*. Boal explains that “[t]he 'Joker's' [function] is a magical reality; he creates it” (Boal 1985). He creates the space necessary for the actors to perform, much like Arcak aims to facilitate boys at the RTC in “finding their own tools.” Boal argues, “[p]erhaps theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!” (Boal 1985). In Boal's Forum Theatre, audience members are often referred to as “*spect-*

actors.” They are both spectators, and performers; while watching a performance on a social issue they are called to intervene and perform solutions. Boal considered this to be a rehearsal for real life. As a rhetorical tool to describe Arcak's work, the youths symbolically represent the actors in a play. With limited freedom in the detention center, she aims to facilitate the discovery of their own tools – strengths, talents, and goals. Her storytelling practices outside the juvenile hall constitute the community as *spect-actors*. Arcak uses herself as an example, giving audience members critical distance through examining someone else's experience, while personalizing the larger issues with affect. In doing this she invites listeners to question their position in the system. By inspiring them to think critically she facilitates a rehearsal for intervention. She truly finds the possible within impossibility.

The performative components of her narratives inspired the interactive qualities of the two act script, particularly as she exposes the manipulative powers of the government. The performance does not open and close with the conventional theatre “blackout.” Though I incorporate blackouts throughout the performance, I use them only to signify transitions through ritual phases. By taking out anticipated blackouts, the performance (1) begins when audiences enter the theater; (2) looks less like entertainment; moves like a “real” life event; and (3) renders audiences as active performers, rather than passive spectators. The audience is a critical representation of the idea of the panopticon, while Jokers 1 and 2 prompt the performance by policing their individualities. Notice, the Narrator is never directly addressed by the Jokers or Uncle Sam. This character—like the boys at the RTC—has been situated as a policing *stool* on

which those in power stand in order to generate social hierarchies that aid in reproducing power structures that successfully police the greater population every day.

The solar plexus and heart chakras are to be staged *as* the ritual that interpellates audience members as prospective initiands themselves. Though I follow a conventional theatre script form, I do so to offer readers a sense of familiarity that minimizes readers' alienation and draws them into interactive participation. I apply these roles to characters representing inmates, power structures, and to you; my audience. Together, and across the entire two-part performance, these theories illuminate Arcah's approaches to access, application, and affect as a prison arts facilitator, while pushing the performativity of my writing.

Upon entrance, audience members are labeled as "*actors*," ("*guest-actors*" to avoid confusion) in the Boalian sense. I label them as such so as not to suggest their participation as audience members is enough to bring forth change. As representations of the idea of the panopticon, they must leave the performance and perform their own narratives in their communities as *spect-actors*, rehearsing the best tactics for dispersing embodied knowledge that illuminates critical issues. The stage actors in the script are labeled "*Jokers*," in a backwards Boalian sense. I say this because in its original context, forum theatre involved disadvantaged communities. My audience, being "free" (not incarcerated), is in a privileged position. Therefore, rather than facilitating a rehearsal for actions that might lead to positive social change within the community that needs it most, these *Jokers* facilitate a parodic performance of maintaining the current status quo. Through parody, the *Jokers* highlight the ridiculousness of operating unquestionably

under power structures, and also illuminate the audience's privilege through the blatant experience of policing them (the audience) to their seats.

Other than the Narrator and Uncle Sam, each character is given a Boalian title taken from his forum theatre method. Neither the Narrator nor Uncle Sam are given the opportunity for transformations as this is not a performance geared towards offering the audience a source of catharsis. Additionally, this first act is largely representative of my research and field experience. I cannot claim my participation in this field has inspired wide spread social change outside of myself and immediate friends and family. The Narrator and Uncle Sam represent the two opposite ends of the spectrum that produce a liminal space within the prison for prison theatre practitioners. The prisoner requires liberation, while the government demands power through policing bodies. As the audience enter as *guest-actors* they remain as such throughout the entire performance. They are invaluable to the performance as representatives of the idea of panopticon, but they are also necessary agents to the possibility of change. Miss, enters as an *actor* alongside the audience, making no claims to have never participated herself; however, her positioning in the middle foreshadows her impending change. Her growing concern for the Narrator signals her transformation from an *actor* into a *spect-actor*, upon which she begins rehearsing solutions for the issue at hand.

The audience separation generates a level of intentional discomfort, in addition to *Jokers* 1 and 2 breaking the "fourth wall" by addressing them directly. Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre theories and methods informed this decision. Epic theatre is defined as "the theatre of destroyed illusions and the wide-awake audience" (Demetz 1962). Brecht

believed traditional theatre offered illusions to an audience, consequently causing wishful thinking. In today's contemporary society many post-modern theorist, such as Jean Baudrillard, argue reality is now our greatest illusion, caused by wide spread simulacra. People are too comfortable living in a utopic illusion generated by mass-media, first world comfort, and rhetoric which suggests we have entered into a post-racial era. This is just not true. Our comfort is produced at the expense of others, and inequality and political tensions are masked, hidden behind closed walls such as the prison. This performance draws from epic theatre ideologies from the moment audience members arrive by stripping them of their most basic resources for comfort—they are separated from the company with whom they arrived. In other words, the performance begins by offering a sense of “reality” outside everyday illusions we accept without question. Furthermore, the stripping of our most basic comforts alongside the assaulting prison sound effects and degrading quality in which they are addressed by the actors on stage, allows for a modest embodied experience of incarceration.

“Theatre of Cruelty” aesthetics signal start of the first scene, “Pre-liminal Conundrums” in Act I, as audiences are assaulted by sounds intended to conjure a sense of panic, and sets the tone for the remainder of performance. Antonin Artaud (creator of Theatre of Cruelty) believed by assaulting his audience's senses (using sounds, lighting effects, etc...) he could awaken unexplored subconscious emotions. Theatre of Cruelty, which emerged after World War I, reflected the artistic Avant-Garde movement which urged society to question power structures. In his “Manifesto in Clear Language,” Artaud ends by explaining “[t]he mind of man has been poisoned by concepts. Do not

ask him to be content, ask him only to be calm, to believe that he has found his place. But only the Madman is really calm” (Artaud 1925). The devastation resulting from WWI caused many artists to question how society could support a government that participated in such destruction. I argue the same in regards to our prison system which systematically oppresses millions of people every year. The prison-industrial complex feeds from and perpetuates gang violence and mentalities through its revolving door. Many inmates with whom I have worked have explained to me that while in prison, you either join a gang, or you do not make it out alive. These are the same people who are released back into our communities, now with criminal records which will hinder their ability to find a job that will support basic costs of living.

Concepts around criminality permeate our daily lives through entertainment and mass media; however, they do not highlight the larger issues that are often the source of criminal activity. Because of this people remain “calm” and content; they accept the fact that millions of families are being torn apart every day because of incarceration (mostly for non-violent offenses); they live comfortably within a mass-mediated illusion of justice. By opening the first scene with Theatre of Cruelty techniques I jar my audience into being present. I demand they let go of the outside world by rattling their consciousness with alarming affect. This technique is to push the audience to recognize their own root chakra, their basic instincts of survival, and to see that their only form of protection is to participate in the impending ritual. That is not to say they are not free to leave; it is that very freedom they embody that pushes their entrance into a realm of parody. Artaud believed by assaulting his audience’s sense he could lead them to

question institutions, beginning with their questioning the theatre. Though his techniques were innovative, therein lies the reason Theatre of Cruelty did not gain popularity. I argue the audience must first question larger power structures before questioning sociocultural conventions, as larger power structures help shape such conventions. In using Artaud's techniques, I believe there should be a delicate balance between startling the audience into a realm of suspicion, and offering a safe space in which to engage with reality.³⁶

The first scene also presents a state of pre-liminality. Turner argues, "figures, representing the poor and the deformed, appear to symbolize the moral values of *communitas* as against the coercive power of supreme political rulers" (Turner 1977). Reaching a state of *communitas* in the ritual process means entering a place where "status-bound social order" is no longer salient among participants. Therefore, the pre-liminal state is rife with painfully clear social hierarchies in operation. I have created this scene in direct response to what seems to be symptomatic of post-modern culture, in regards to our prison system: These hierarchies are, in many ways, invisible and must be highlighted.³⁷ Within this scene actors interact with the audience through comedic tones, again, parodying the hierarchical system as a means to make it visible. The humor encourages audience participation without jeopardizing the jarring affect produced in the opening. This affect is maintained through audience anxieties of not knowing whether or not they will be addressed by the performers.

³⁶ If the scripted performance were to be staged in actuality, the director should be prudent with the length of time in which participants are subjected to audio violence.

³⁷ I engage post-modern theory using "Miss," the main character in the two-act performance, within the second act.

Theatre of the Absurd techniques, performed by the narrator, introduces affective qualities generated within the prison theatre practitioner's paradox. The narrator recites an untitled poem by Artaud himself, in a fast-paced, monotone voice, conjuring a sense of pointless desperation. This technique was inspired by my experiences with Samuel Beckett, who is ascribed as an absurdist playwright. Theatre of the Absurd was driven by a similar mission as Theatre of Cruelty. Influenced by the effects of World War II, it asks audiences to question social convention, which at the time suggested "[k]illing a man becomes as serious—or nonserious—as stealing his money or playing a trumpet" (Killinger 1971). Absurdist plays offered audiences an existentialist journey, spawned by WWII's massive destruction. Artists questioned the meaning of life as government-sanctioned genocides confused binaries of right and wrong.

The high speed in which the Narrator speaks in this performance, contradictorily complimented by monotony, generates a quality of affect that hints towards the inexistence of answers to a problem that desperately needs solving. *Why is over 72% of the U.S. prison population comprised of inmates who are incarcerated for non-violent crimes?*³⁸ Non-violent crimes, I might add, that create enormous economic social disparities, leading many to seek out alternative (illegal) forms of generating income. *Why is nearly half of the prison population comprised of African Americans, when they only comprise around a quarter of the U.S. population as a whole?*³⁹ *Why the heck aren't people angrier about this, given the painful racist history upon which the U.S.*

³⁸ As reported by the Sentencing Project.

³⁹ As reported by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people (NAACP).

was built? Our criminal justice system operates against the moral codes it claims to constitute by law. Furthermore, Drawing from a number of different sources, statistics report up to 7,000 inmates a year die while incarcerated. With a 40-year expansion of the prison system which emerged in the 1970s, this suggests the deaths of potentially 280,000 prison inmates could have occurred within that time frame, caused by a number of issues ranging from police brutality, to gang violence, to inhumane living conditions and the spread of disease, to suicide, etc... While conducting research on this particular issue, I was unable to pin-point a precise statistic representing prison deaths, which simply illustrates the level of control of mass-mediated information on criminality. Regardless, if only half the number of lives I proposed above were lost in the prison-industrial complex, this issue still suggest a systematic, government sanctioned process of exploiting and extinguishing a particular population of people.

I cannot compare our prison system to the devastation of the Jewish Holocaust where six million Jews were tortured and killed; our prisons cannot kill 6 million people due to our capitalist needs. The private prison industry is a \$3 billion a year industry; however, *do black and brown lives really matter in the U.S. now, any more than Jewish lives mattered in Nazi Germany?* If we continue down the path we are going, our prison-industrial complex will be known for creating a prison holocaust of its own. The use of Theatre of Absurd techniques in the scripted performance generates a “horizontal communitas” with the artists of its time who were deeply affected by the Holocaust in

WWII.⁴⁰ This problem also mirrors the prison theatre practitioner's paradox in that she aims towards offering potential solutions to a problem (the prison system), but must use the problem in order to explore solutions.

In the second scene in Act I, "The 'Actor' Prepares," Miss is exposed as a participant in the panopticon through a seemingly harmless evening in front of the TV, coupled with a phone conversation she has with an inmate with whom she is closely tied. Throughout the second scene Miss grapples with her privilege, begs pardon her ignorance, and eventually accepts her own position in our prison system. With this acceptance she becomes invigorated by the possibility of a liminal transformation from being a *spect-actor* herself, into a *joker* upon leaving the prison. She embraces her flawed position as a means to move forward. This scene represents my own personal struggles with the prison system; my frustrations with academia; and my anxiety around possibilities of generating dehumanizing representations of my interlocutor, and the inmates I encountered, as data in my research. This scene both introduces the preparations I underwent before beginning fieldwork, and positions me within my research for readers who are (hopefully) skeptical of any bias I may hold. Aesthetically, scene two is simple, including iconic aspects of ritual (as yet another meta-commentary on the two act performance as ritual itself). It also offers brief elements of realist esthetics to represent how easy it is to become part of the system, simply by ingesting mass-mediated propaganda that overtly spins criminality in a racist manner.

⁴⁰ In "Telling Treasure Tales: Commemoration and Consciousness in Dominica." Deidre Rose introduces the idea of a horizontal *communitas* by which locals in Dominica reach a state of *communitas* with their ancestors through daily cultural performances.

Miss struggles with preparations for entry into liminality—the prison. She calls forth the deities of theory for strength and awakening: Dwight Conquergood, D. Soyini Madison, and Victor Turner himself. Madison, in this scene, is not only a source of theoretical enlightenment, her scholarship also guides the shape of this scene, and the overarching format of this project as a process of embodied writing. Madison offers an embodied writing performance formatted in six acts (or chapters), simply labeled by Roman numerals as I offer here. She does not include any subtitles for each act, though “V” is composed of two scenes in which she engages in conversations with three influential philosophers: Karl Marx, Ferdinand De Saussure, and Jacques Derrida. Madison does not quote these philosophers’ scholarship to the extent in which I quoted her, Conquergood, and Turner in the second scene in act one. In her conversations she responds to each philosopher in a way that communicates their work in conversation with how it influences her own. In that respect, I follow her lead feeling “always aware of power, beauty, pain, language, race, and [my]self. But theory circles you back to all of them, including yourself” (Madison 1999). By engaging theory through an embodied conversation I self-reflexively positioned myself within my research, and generated a deeper understanding of the embodied knowledge I had gained while working with Arcak at the RTC as the two (theory and ethnography) coalesced within me.

My use of block quotes within the script was also intentional. In arguing Arcak’s narratives are performative by giving them a voice in their Texas community, I sought to reinforce this method throughout the entirety of the script. I wanted to offer an unfiltered (though certainly framed) presence of Madison, Turner, and Conquergood—all of whom

I consider to be social activists through their scholarship—within my performance. Though they worked in different fields than my own, this thesis aims to suggest all forms of struggle and oppression should be collectively shared. In fact, I use this method throughout the entire script, methodologically choosing quotes from performance artists Antonin Artaud and Hijikata Tatsumi whose work was largely influenced by large social issues. Additionally, the closing scene of the entire performance, “The ‘Joker’ Prepares,” offers quotes from published inmate and prison theatre practitioner narratives. All of the inmates with whom I have worked have been male, and this thesis draws specifically from female perspectives and experiences with prison theatre and the criminal justice system. With the already massive amounts of data I collect and my decision to focus specifically on Arcak, I cannot begin to comment on the vast number of experiences within the prison. I could, and did, include some of them in order to continue pushing towards collective social activism, and offer a potential starting point for others who wish to provide a platform and voice for prison theatre practitioners and incarcerated populations as well.

Finally, the third scene in Act I, “The Liminal ‘Spect-actor,’” portrays Miss in a juvenile hall (based off of my time at the RTC with the TreeHouse Project). Here she plays with the convention of time, an aspect of life that is particularly important in Western societies, and polices our day to day activities. She speaks both in the present and past tense, pushing herself even further into liminality. She performs her liminal position through abstract representations of my field notes. Miss generates affect through Butoh inspired movements in which her body is contorted in ways that scrape away her

identity (see figure 1).⁴¹ In fact, Butoh is argued to have been ideologically influenced by Theatre of Cruelty. It was created by Japanese dancer Hijikata Tatsumi and, like Theatre of the Absurd, emerged after WWII. With the devastating effects of Hiroshima, Tatsumi sought to create an art form that could harness the darker side of human nature (which, at the time devoured Japan), in order to find beauty within the wreckage. In constant movement she becomes misshapen, resisting bodily labels and the boundaries in which she feels constrained. At the same time, many of her movements are controlled by two *Actors* who have confined her with chains. This imagery introduces my main argument. While chained, Miss looks physically uncomfortable but maintains a joyful demeanor through facial expressions. Though she is physically controlled by the panoptic *Actors*, they cannot contain her experiences or emotions. She will use affect generated by those experiences to transgress the institution's walls as an advocate for prisoners.

The institutional boundaries are also challenged by frogs in scene three (see figure 2). I use frog characters to represent the child-like innocence of the detainees I encountered while in the field. My use of frogs is also a tactical means to protect the identity of the youths with whom I had interactions, and as a visual tool to emphasize the

⁴¹ Butoh emerged out of dance and is known to explore the darker side of human nature. Kurihara Nanako's "Hijikata Tatsumi: The Words of Butoh" explains Butoh as an art form that embraced paradox. By exploring the darkest sides of life one can find light; ugly is beautiful; death is life. Butoh dances resisted labeling of bodies through social convention. It is because of this I incorporate both Butoh movement and theory within this project in order to highlight the positive aspects of paradox and the possibilities engendered by liminality.



Figure 1: Performer, Jessica Cooper, exploring Butoh-inspired movements following a staged reading of the script. Photo credit: Danielle N. Sather, 2015.



Figure 2: Performer, Jenika Shannon, finds herself in a frog-like position during a movement exercise at a staged reading of the script. Photo credit: Danielle N. Sather 2015

“othering” process incarcerated populations experience. This scene is a turning point marking my own realizations of the *invisible* boundaries I was forced to negotiate while at the RTC. I was in many ways forced to manage my affective and physical boundaries (with the boys) much more than I would have had I been in a state juvenile hall. Scene three depicts my first day in the field where I was informed of a glitch in my paperwork and asked to observe activities from a distance. At the same time, I had already spent the morning co-facilitating an inspiring conversation with the boys about art; and the presence of a new face from across the yard was seductive enough to entice the youngsters to cross boundaries at the opportunity for attention and a fresh start with a stranger.

In scene three Miss strips away everything she knew herself to be. It is painful, but productive. Through liminality she moves from Boal’s “*spect-actor*,” to being a “*joker*” in facilitating an exploration through finding the best tactics for change with others. This scene comes directly from my most difficult experience while working with the TreeHouse project. As I watched the boys collaboratively hand paint a large canvass from the distance I was subject to their affective flows. In other words, I could feel their desperation for individual attention. At the end of this first session, while everyone was cleaning up one of the boys was left unattended outside with me. He was the most timid in the group, having hid himself from my vision for the beginning of our conversation. He approached me with a frog he caught in the yard and began proudly listing an impressive list of frog facts. It was an incredibly heartwarming experience to see him emerge from his shy demeanor. I wanted to hold him as if he was my own. This was also

an experience in which I could not fully appreciate due to my inability to direct him inside with the rest of the group. A nervous tension devoured me and I was troubled with questions such as: Will this interaction get me in trouble? If I am caught spending unsupervised (and at the time prohibited) time with this kid, what will happen (to me, the boy, the TreeHouse Project, or the RTC)? If somebody walks out will he get in trouble? Can this innocent interaction put the TreeHouse Project at risk of being banned from the RTC? I panicked, eventually muscling up the courage to say “I’m not technically supposed to be talking to you right now.”

With those eleven measly words I instantly felt bombarded with shame. A new set of questions flooded my body: How could I turn him away like that? Have I ruined a potential bond we could have formed within this program? How many people have turned him away in the past? Is his heart breaking right now as much as mine is? With those eleven measly words I saw disappointment devour him as he responded with a simple “why?” I answered him saying “because my paperwork has not been completed and they need to verify that I am a safe person.” He said nothing more, placed his frog in a large white bucket, turned away from me just in time for an RTC employee to call him inside to join the rest of the group. With this experience I was humbled; I returned home where I collapsed in tears beside my bed. Scene three does not merely aim at recreating this experience for my audience. In fact, per Schechner, this is not even possible since not only will the context change, but also the presence of different bodies will generate a flawed representation. Rather, scene three aims at generating an affect similar to what I

experienced for the audience. Scene three concludes Act I of the play, where we see focus shift from Miss' liminal transformation to the audience's potential transformation.

The Act II of the ritual performance illuminates Miss' achieved *communitas* in the first scene, "Pre-liminal Conundrums;" she becomes one of the ensemble. At the same time, *communitas* only deepens her burden and obligation to the frogs. After all, at the end of the day she can leave their caged atmosphere while they are left behind with no other voice in their communities other than her own. It is in this scene that we also see her timidly, yet boldly accepting her role as *joker*. That is, she figuratively strips away any pre-liminal containments of herself by removing her clothing. This is a performance of resistance and liberation from free-world entrapments. It is in many ways a scene that calls for a return to the collective. This scene re-highlights pre-liminal conundrums and social hierarchies as Miss offers reflections on Act I; only this time the scene is not shaped solely by my particular research field. Here I include an exploration of how social hierarchies are perpetuated within the greater (free) community. At the top of the scene Uncle Sam states "I want you," along me to draw affect from iconic imagery generated by the U.S. military-industrial complex, again, signaling a horizontal *communitas* with artists as social activists working in protest around WWI and WWII.

Miss also shares a story of a past experience she has in Mexico within this scene, where she highlights our capitalist system through remembering her embodied experiences encountering poverty and disease. Additionally, by referencing sickness, she brings in dimension of the health care system as panoptic. Within this scene the Narrator, in the same absurdist technique as seen in act one, quotes Hijikata Tatsumi's

(the founder of Butoh) own words on prison. With Tatsumi's words, the Narrator prompts audience members to recognize their own prison. Even in the free world we too are stripped of freedom: freedom from social demarcations; freedom to be ugly, grotesque, or disabled without being labeled as such against negative connotations; freedom from time by which their daily lives are shaped and monitored.

The second scene in Act II, "The 'Joker' Prepares," Miss explicitly condemns any passive audience members by explaining our passivity in life only perpetuates the current mode of power distribution. Miss is alone on stage, as she was in the second scene of Act I, watching TV. This time she has no comfortable pillows, blankets, or popcorn, and the TV programs she watches seem to portray a more truthful image of society than they did in act one. In this scene we also see Miss finally embodying her role as *joker* with the help of the ensemble, who have also become *Jokers*. Miss could not have undergone this transformation without the collective ritual experience with the frogs. As Miss now carries the responsibility to bring their stories into her community, she mutually creates *Jokers* of the frogs. Together, Miss and the *Jokers* prepare the audience members for their transformations into *spect-actors*.

Miss' narratives in the second scene are informed by post-modern theory. She entices the audience towards questions such as: *Have we ever really been free, unpoliced, "individuals" in society? Is our social world an illusion created by those in power? Does our individuality paradoxically produce and constitute a set of normalized social conventions?* While speaking she dresses herself in vibrant colors as the ensemble paint themselves as well as her face with vibrant joker patterns. In essence, their

performance in this scene is a statement on the power of performance in our daily lives. Miss' first moments of dialogue with the audience is inspired by Stjepan G. Meštrović's *Postemotional Society*, while the ensemble and Narrator mirror his ideas through their interactions with her. Meštrović's scholarship illuminates the importance of my intervention as he argues postemotional societies "revel in the useless, in luxury. The habits of the leisure class [...] have permeated to the middle and lower classes, indeed all social classes [...] everything in society becomes an aesthetic, and that aesthetic is not confined to fields of culture and art" (Meštrović 1997). That is to suggest widespread technological advancements have made possible the mechanization of emotions, producing a passive, arguably apathetic, society. In other words, reality has become manipulatively aestheticized, mass-mediated, and dispersed in a way that produces inactive responses through ease of access, ideological spins, and (de)sensitization.

Miss calls the audience out on this issue as she sits nearly naked being watched. She positions their passivity as shameful by situating them as "peeping Toms" in conversation with daily habits of passively watching television. In doing this I also informed her character in this scene using David Riesman's idea of the "inside-dopester," so as not to suggest Miss aims to create her own moral hierarchies; rather, she refuses to participate in current social convention. Riesman offers a sociological perspective on ideological social evolutions where society can be seen having moved from being primarily "tradition-directed," to "inner-directed", to what we see today as "other-directed." Identity construction and social behaviors in tradition-directed societies

are largely influenced directly from family interactions, and are often shaped through religious devotion (or other culturally specific traditions). In contrast, other-directed societies tends to look towards their peers and mass-media as part of identity construction processes, and self-validation. These types of societies tend to be individualistically driven, whereas tradition-directed societies maintain a collective mentality with their communities. Inner-directed societies can be simplified as encompassing aspects from both tradition and other-directedness. The inside-dopster emerges in other-directed societies as an individual who sometimes “crave[s] to *be* inside, to join an inner circle or invent one” (Riesman 2001). In fact, Miss already situated herself as such by exclaiming she’d often wished she could experience incarceration, in the first scene. The inside-dopster might go to great lengths in resisting uniformity with the outsider. This becomes apparent in Miss during the second scene as she is visually transformed into a *joker*.

Miss’ positioning as an inside-dopster is justified drawing from ideas relating to Jean Baudriallard’s idea of the “simulacra,” which defines a hyperreality produced through widespread reproductions of “paradise.” That is, paradise becomes mundane in post-industrial America where first world comfort feels to be universal privilege as the darker sides of humanity are hidden from the public eye—often by way of prisons. *Can we ever “resolve the enigma of the relation between the negative foundations of greatness and that greatness itself?”* (Baudriallard 2010). Miss suggests this conundrum through her insinuations that we, as Americans, live in a state of illusionary realism. She slyly offers a meta-commentary on the performance, hinting towards questions such as:

Could real life (outside the performance in which they are participating) be defined as an embodied process if theatrical realism, written by those in power and produced by society itself? Is the performance, with all its abstractions, less of an illusion than what we know to be reality? Is society, as a whole, stuck in a state of paradox? And if so, is the recognition of society as the ultimate liminal space the answer to our problem?

Finally, the third scene in Act II, “Hailing ‘Spect-actors,’” challenges the audience’s boundaries of affect. Drawing from published inmate writings and scholarship written by prison theatre practitioner’s other than my own interlocutors (in the form of monologues), the performers begin by offering a larger scope of prison experiences and perspectives outside my research. Alongside these monologues, the performers on stage produce a variety of images compelling self-reflection around collective responsibility—reflecting the affect I experienced my first day in the field. The performers do this through Boalian “image theatre” techniques. There are three phases of Boal’s image theatre: actual image, ideal image, and transitional image. Traditionally, image theatre is an interactive process between performers and spectators. The performers present themselves as statues that can be sculpted to represent a participant’s opinion. Once a theme is established a group of performers create a statue that represents the actual image of said theme (or issue). Following this, another group create a statue that portray an ideal image of the theme. Finally, the participant is asked to sculpt a statue that represent how such a change might be possible.

In the ritual script presented here, two actual images are offered: one representing issues of incarceration (see figure 3), the other representing issue of oppression in the

free world (see figure 4). Rather than offering the audience a glimpse of the ideal image, the final image in the performance is a transitional image (see figure 5). The transitional image is meant to direct audiences, now (hopefully) willing *spect-actors* to exit the theatre with the stories they have been told, and explore their own ways of working towards an ideal image. Upon completing that role, they would ideally have been inspired, and generated their own tools, to eventually take on a *joker* role within their own communities to work towards achieving an ideal image.



Figure 3: Performers (from left) Jessica Cooper, Katie Elder, Hannah Adamy, Jenika Shannon, and Azucena White presenting individual “actual” image statues. Photo credit: Danielle N. Sather 2015



Figure 4: Performance (named in figure 3) producing an "actual" image. Photo credit: Danielle N. Sather, 2015



Figure 5: Performers (named in figure 3) creating a "transitional" image. Photo credit: Danielle N. Sather, 2015

At the end of the performance there is no blackout. This performance does not end. The ensemble escorts audience members through the same panoptic obstacles they encountered as they entered the space. There is no resolution offered, no closure to the performance, and no comfort offered to their liminal states. They are merely asked to leave, and to reconcile this issue—perhaps through storytelling. I draw from Bertolt Brecht who believed the theatre should not be a place for audiences to escape the world. His characters often broke the fourth wall as a reminder to spectators they were watching a play. By doing this, Brecht believed audience members would maintain a critical distance; they would not experience catharsis; they would hopefully leave having been inspired to take action. Throughout this performance the characters certainly do break the fourth wall; however, in contrast to Brecht's approach this performance aims heavily towards allowing an audience to become invested in the world of the show as performers themselves. By offering no true resolution to the issues presented, audience members should leave feeling driven to access *communitas* in their own lives. By taking ownership of each other's stories I truly believe our communities can begin bridging the gap between prisoners and their communities. Only once that happens can real prison reformation become a possibility.

VI. THIRD EYE CHAKRA: CONCLUSION

“From a higher consciousness, this new way of knowing brings an integrated awareness. One knows directly with one's entire being, rather than piecemeal by laborious discursive thought.”

The third eye chakra is one through which I cannot guide you. Here, I offer a space for you to reflect on the narratives you have read, explore the affect you currently embody, and invite you to join an extended family—as Arcak did for me. I cannot expect the profound impacts the research process and composition of this thesis had on me will have transferred into my reader's bodies. I recognize each person comes from their own unique background, and thus, their experiences and understandings of this ritual will vary. At the same time, there is a certain level of universality in human experience. This is a paradox in which we all traverse daily. We all suffer in different ways. After all, who has the authority to define exactly what suffering is for each individual? We are all policed and oppressed in some way or another. I ask you to consider these somewhat contradictory statements, and embrace paradox in your own lives. This is not simply a calling for prison reformation; though that is certainly where my passion lies. This is a charge for us to recognize that the prisoner's oppression; is queer oppression; is gender oppression; is oppression due to poverty; is racial oppression; is the prison theatre practitioner's oppression... This is a call to the collective through diversity rather than conformity, and so, I will leave you with one last story to help guide this ritual to its closing.

While working on the final phases of this thesis, I was simultaneously working on a short performance with a small group of junior performance studies scholars. We

were tasked to devise an intervention on a script that focused on issues around life as a Mexican-American. Our group was incredibly diverse – from our upbringings, to race, and sexuality. We worked for two months composing and rehearsing a ritual performance of our own. There were some ups and downs during the process; however, one thing that surprised me was that each of use found a personal investment in the performance, bonding our individual missions to support our overall performance goals.

When performance day arrived we gathered our props, prepared our “found space” (non-traditional performance space), and took great risks with our characters. The presence of an audience generated a level of affect we had not prepared for. We were all surprised, once the performance came to an end, to receive quite negative responses and condemnation. Backlash lingered for days as people told their own stories about the experience. Some of the comments we heard included: “your performance was a failure;” “it was a mistake;” “what were you thinking?” These comments, among many more, momentarily derailed the confidence I had in myself as a scholar, performer, and even as an individual. We thought we discussed all the dangers and had informed them with theory. I was devastated. The entire group felt mortified and ashamed.

It took a few days for me to come to the realization that, while it is incredibly important to take care of my audience, our performance was not a failure, nor a mistake. If a twenty-minute performance can provoke such heavy backlash, then we had created a performance experience in which our audience members were not merely passive consumers. In fact, we did some receive positive feedback, and ironically that feedback

came from student-audience members who were asked to directly participate within an interactive element we had incorporated into the performance.

All of the theatre theorists I draw from within this thesis did the same with their art. Boal, Artaud, Brecht, and Tatsumi all stimulated their audiences to be active in their performances, forcing them to contend with their own positions in society. Performance is powerful. This power is created through movements of affect, and affect cannot be contained without our permission. Even as a prisoner, one can be cleansed through liminal rains...

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